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VOL. 2384.

GREEN PLEASURE AND GREY GRIEF

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "MOLLY BAWN."

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. 1.

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GREEN PLEASURE AND GREY GRIEF.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

“These many years since we began to be,
What have the gods done with us? What with me,
What with my love? They have shown me fates and fears,
Harsh springs, and fountains bitterer than the sea,
Grief a fixed star, and joy a vane that veers,
 These many years.”

GREEN PLEASURE
AND
GREY GRIEF.

BY THE
AUTHOR OF "MOLLY BAWN."

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VOL. I.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1886.

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GREEN PLEASANT

GREEN GRIFF

AUTHOR OF "MORALITY"



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GREEN PLEASURE AND GREY GRIEF.

CHAPTER I.

“In vain men tell us time can alter
Old loves or make old memories falter,
That with the old year, the old year's life closes.
The old dew still falls on the old sweet flowers,
The old sun revives the new-fledged hours,
The old summer rears the new-born roses.”

SWINBURNE.

A DYING sunset, a sloping lawn, a rushing, tumbling stream, a clump of giant firs to the right, a suspicion of odorous garden sweets from the left, two forms in God's own likeness, and a roaring raging ocean down below—all seem blended into one artistic whole, calm, almost motionless, save for the quarrelling of the turbulent river and the faint dashing of the waves against the rocks upon the barren coast.

Slowly the early summer sun is setting. Pale, with sad regret, he quits the lovely earth, and prepares to lay down his arms before night's queen. Already

Dian's crescent marks the sky—faint yet, because so far away, but marching ever nearer, nearer, glad with the certainty of victory assured; the happy wind, that all day long has rioted in bower and "pleasaunce faire" has gone to rest; a languorous stillness lies on all around; the air is heavy with the breath of drowsy flowers.

"Ah, this dear England!" says a young sweet voice, in a tone of quick delight. "Though I have only known it for a little week, still it seems to me that it, and no other land, means home!"

The voice belongs to the prettiest lips in the world, the lips to the prettiest girl, a slender thing of about seventeen, with a subtle charm about her difficult to describe, and with a face most sweet, most fair, made up "of every creature's best;" a clear broad brow, clear eyes are hers, and a tender loving mouth on which is writ in plainest print the gentle workings of the innocent soul within.

She is lying back in her garden-chair, with a white shawl thrown across her whiter gown. There is a little touch of languor about her idle hands and her entire pose, a something indefinite to fear in the excessive fairness of her roseleaf skin; there is indeed a spirituality about her every glance and action, an eagerness, a brightness too great for her fragile frame. Her companion, a tall, aristocratic-looking woman of about forty-five, glances at her with some anxiety.

"I hope you will be happy here," she says, with a little sigh.

"Happy! Oh, that is nothing! I am always happy. And what a sigh, auntie; I believe you are still pining for your mosquitoes and your garlic."

The elder woman smiles gently, and pats the small hand extended to her. That she is slave to the owner of that little hand one can see at the first glance. Though she is a stern-featured woman, with a face full of possible reservations and certain power, and the lines and marks of long years replete with unutterable grief, there are signs too upon it of natural tendencies bravely repressed, and of self-abnegation that has yet failed to embitter the strong, courageous spirit within. One firm to bear and swift to read and sure to comprehend, she sits here calmly with the girl's hand in hers, as though no bitterness from out the cruel past had blanched her soft dark hair.

"I wonder what our neighbours will be like?" says the young girl, vivaciously. "Do you know any of them?"

"Only by hearsay. Your grand-uncle, during his last illness in Florence, where, as you know, I went to attend him, used to speak of some of them at times, but only casually, and without interest. At Kingmore, which I take it, must be about three miles from this, Sir George and Lady Bouverie live with their two sons, and somewhere close to them, the Ponsonbys of the Hollows; but this is only guesswork. I hardly know where they live, or if they live at all."

"Are the Ponsonbys a large family?"

"No; only father and daughter. Mr. Ponsonby is brother to Lady Bouverie, and comes of a good old family, but a poor one. He is a great scholar, I believe, but rather dreamy, and a book-worm; he reads with young men for the army, or something like that. You see I am a little obscure on all points."

"I am glad he has a daughter, at least; I have so seldom had girl friends. I wish, too, Lady Bouverie's family meant one son and one daughter; don't you?"

"I don't think so, my dear. Experience has taught me that young men are preferable to young women—one young woman"—fondly—"excepted."

"Ah, that is because you are such a sad flirt!" says the young girl, gaily, at which they both laugh without reservation as at some very superior joke.

"Alas for one's secret sins; they are sure to find one out!" murmurs the elder woman, lightly, running her fingers with a lingering fondness through the soft short rings of sunny hair that cover the pretty head so near to her.

A little laugh breaks from Dolores. She springs to her feet, and, throwing from her the shawl that has shielded her from the evening breeze, as though somewhat impatient of the care lavished upon her, runs eagerly to the garden on her left. Here flowers throng her path. Having made a delicate raid upon them, she returns again to her aunt's side and flings herself upon the grass at her feet. Her invasion of the summer garden has borne fruit. She now lies, with her head well-thrown back against Miss Maturin's knee, admiring, with leisurely grace, the tall white lily in her hand, the sweet result of her assault.

"Tell me, auntie," she says presently, lifting her eyes to the pale face above her, "how long is it since my grand-uncle died?"

"Just seventeen years."

"Why, his death is as old as my birth!"

"Yes."

As though a shadow from out the long-buried past

has come to her with the girl's words, Miss Maturin starts, and a quick frown falls upon her brow.

"Seventeen years!" says Dolores. "What a long, long time! And yet, though he left you this place, you never once came to see it. How unkind of you to hide its beauties from me until now! Why did you not come home sooner, and bring me with you?"

The shadow deepens on the elder woman's face.

"Perhaps I had a fancy for travelling," she says, slowly.

"A lasting one, wasn't it? But I wonder you could keep away from this place, knowing it so beautiful."

"I didn't know it; I never saw it until now."

"Not when your uncle was alive?"

"There is nothing so wonderful in that. He was always abroad, and we had our own place up in the North."

"As nice a home as this?"

"No. A bleak, cold, barren place—a hateful place! I never wish to see or hear of it again." There is suppressed horror in her tone.

"Why? Did my mother die there?" questions the girl, softly.

"No." Miss Maturin, getting up somewhat abruptly, moves so as to stand behind Dolores's chair, and leans upon the back of it. "Look at that dying sunset," she says, quickly. "Could anything be more lovely? Mark the clear streaks of orange and crimson, such straight pure bars, such——"

"It is as perfect as all this perfect scene; I feel I can never tire of it. But where did my mother die, auntie? Was it abroad?"

"Yes, abroad. Keep that shawl more closely

round your chest, Dolores; there is often a chill in these summer winds. What a pretty little shawl it is! Where was it we bought it? Geneva, eh?"

"No, Lucerne. Have you forgotten? It was on just such an evening as this we saw—and fell in love with—it. But where abroad did my mother die, auntie? In France?"

"Yes, in France." She looks round her a little helplessly, as if distressed. "About your grand-uncle," she says, rapidly; "you were asking me about him just now, were you not? Such an eccentric old man as he was, but not altogether unlovable. He had his heart set on Italy, though why, none of us knew. He had no kin there, no friend, no love, and no special desire for art that I could see; yet he declined to be happy out of Florence. When dying, his greatest consolation was in the thought that his bones would lie there for ever."

"I can understand him," says the girl, dreamily. "To lie for ever at rest in stately Florence would have its charm; but, to me to die in such a land as this, near the waving corn and the scented flowers, with the cool night wind sighing above my grave, would be a greater happiness."

"Better live in such a land," says Miss Maturin, hastily. "And is this an evening on which to talk of death or the grave?"

"You are right. Let us go back, then, to our original topic," acquiesces the girl, gaily, with unconscious cruelty. "Tell me about my mother. But come round here to me first, Lallie; I cannot see your face there."

Miss Maturin, after a faint hesitation, going back

to her seat, turns her face to her niece with a straight but rather forced gaze.

"Why not rather talk about our coming life here?" she says.

"To-morrow—any other time will do for that; but now I want to know something real of my mother. All you have yet told me is so little, so vague, so shadowy. But to-day, when we have come to her own land, the longing is strong upon me to know more of her. There must be something in the air to-night that compels me to think of her."

"There is so little to tell," says Miss Maturin. Her voice has changed its kindly ring, and now sounds constrained and harsh. "A young life cut short in its nineteenth year—what should there be of any moment in it?"

"Tell me," says the girl, leaning towards her, the soft wind roughening her pretty short hair as she moves, "was her marriage a happy one? Was it," leaning even closer to her, the better to watch her face, in glad expectation of her answer, "a love-marriage?"

But no answer comes to her. A deadly silence seems to have enveloped Miss Maturin; it lasts for quite a minute—a long time, when two large grey eyes are watching one in puzzled surprise. At length, by a supreme effort, she breaks it.

"How can I tell?" she says, coldly. "I was not with her at the time; I was in Italy with my uncle. You have surely forgotten!"

"But you saw her afterwards, when you took me, a little baby, from her arms?"

"From her dying arms, yes; but that was no time for confidences, or thoughts of worldly love."

"No true love can be worldly," says the girl, absently; then, with a playful little laugh, "but that I know you would not dare do it," she says, smoothing lightly the hand that lies in hers, "I should say you were trying not to answer me."

"Why should I do that?"

"I don't know—perhaps—why will you never speak of my mother to me, auntie? Is it—is it because you did not love her?"

"Perhaps it is because I loved her too well!" returns Miss Maturin, an ashen tint overspreading her face. She shrinks as she says it, and, stooping, presses upon the girl's slender fingers a tremulous caress. A sudden flood of colour springs into Dolores's cheeks, her lips quiver.

"Forgive me!" she whispers, slipping one arm round her aunt's neck. "I was cruel to you? It hurts you, I can now see, to speak of her! How could I urge you so! Our dead are always so precious, and I——"

"It is nothing. Do not distress yourself about it. It is over already. But you are right, child," with a visible effort, "it does hurt me to speak of—your mother!"

"And my father?"—timidly.

"All are dead—all gone!" says Miss Maturin, in a clear, cold voice. "Let us not bring them to life again. Let the past lie. The present only is our own; let us be content with it. Beloved child"—with sudden excitement—"think of the glorious sunset, the sky,

the sea, the flowers, all that you tell me you love, but never of the years gone by!"

"Dearest, I will think of nothing that can cause you pain; and here, in this happy England, you will forget your early griefs—with me to love you. Is it not? You will stay here, auntie? You will not want to wander again?"

"I hope not"—very quietly; but some piercing thought disturbs the treacherous calm. "I hope," she says again suddenly, with vainly chidden passion, "that nothing will ever happen to drive us from this place of refuge."

"Why, auntie, how strangely you say that!" says the girl. "What is it, then?"—softly, with the sweetest anxiety.

"Nothing, child! Nothing, my beloved one! But, when one has suffered much, one has doubts even in one's happiest hours."

"Must all suffer?" asks Dolores, seriously, her eyes full of pitying wonder, not so much for herself, perhaps, as for the world at large.

"Nay, not all. Some are more fortunate than others—yet all must feel the knife. To some it is blunt, to some sharp and poisoned as a serpent's fang. Many have seemingly prosperous lives; but there is always death, my darling, the most prosperous cannot conquer that! Alas, what a bird of ill omen I am to my own bright bonny bird! But you would have me speak, and, after all, sweetheart, there is only one grief that can quite rend the heart in twain."

"And that?"

The beautiful childish lips are parted, the starry eyes are opened wide.

"Is dishonour! But the very breath of it must not come nigh you. It cannot, it shall not, after all these years!" she exclaims fiercely, but so low that her last words do not reach Dolores's ears.

"Dishonour? Ah, yes, that is what would touch one!" she says, thoughtfully.

"It shall not touch you."

"No, no, of course not; and yet"—slipping from her chair down upon her knees, and casting her pretty half-naked arms across Miss Maturin's lap, "you speak"—glancing at her wistfully—"as if it had come near you; and how could it, without touching me?"

"I was but imagining a case. Tut, child!"—with a swift frown. "Must one never converse except of personalities? Once in a way perforce one wanders afield. And as for suffering of any sort—what has it got to do with you while your old aunt is here to protect you? Come, forget this idle conjecturing; let us rather think and plan for a happy morrow that shall be but the commencement of many happier ones."

CHAPTER II.

“I said—‘she must be swift and white
And subtly warm, and half perverse,
And sweet like sharp soft fruit to bite;
And like a snake’s love, lithe and fierce.’
Men have guessed worse.”

SWINBURNE.

“I THINK our new neighbours are likely to prove interesting,” says Lady Bouverie, sweeping her black fan indolently to and fro.

“That means they are either savages, or endued with rarer attributes than most,” returns a young man, who is busying himself pulling the ears of a black-and-tan terrier; another young man, lounging against the open window, says nothing.

It is a sultry afternoon in mid-June—heavy, burdensome, because of its unbroken heat. The wind has forgotten the earth; the roses—its lovers—are drooping outside in the garden; the sunflowers, stately and grand in their long, stiff beds, are glowing and sighing in vain.

“Miss Maturin I thought cold in manner, but aristocratic in appearance,” goes on Lady Bouverie. “She is of good blood beyond question, the Maturins of Egley, from whom they all come, being quite everything one could desire. They can count as many generations as the ordinary parvenu his years.”

“Can Miss Maturin count many years?” asks the young man with the terrier, half insolently.

"More than you can, certainly. She is about forty or forty-five, I should say."

"Alas and alack! And is she the heiress? Are all my fond hopes to be so cruelly dashed? Is there no saving clause? Is she the whole of our new neighbours?"

"My dear Bruno, do let Fifa's ears alone; I'm sure she can't like that incessant pulling! No, there is a niece: such a pretty creature, all warmth and sunshine, the most extreme contrast to the aunt, who to me appeared really rather forbidding. It seems she—the niece—is the heiress, as she inherits all her aunt's property, which is considerable, both here and in the North. A charming girl I thought her."

For an instant her eyes wander to her elder son, leaning idly half in, half out of the window, and apparently indifferent to the conversation. His indifference seems at this moment to cause her some annoyance; she frowns slightly, and taps her foot upon the floor with unmistakable impatience. She is a tall woman of the bony type, with a cold, haughty expression, an eye like an eagle, and a Roman nose. Her lips are as thin as her sympathies, her eyes as colourless as her sentiments. Neither of her sons, except in height, in the least resembles her. They are both tall, well-knit young men, with sufficient good looks to command a second glance; Bruno, the younger, being a shade darker than Dick, the elder, and perhaps a shade more companionable to the ordinary acquaintance.

"I will take your word for it all," says Bruno. "I feel she is the girl for me! Warmth and sunshine and an heiress who is a beauty is as much as any reason-

able fellow can expect. At all events, I shouldn't cavil at it."

"I hope you intend to make a long stay in the country now, Richard," says Lady Bouverie, turning to her elder son and ignoring the frivolity of the younger. "It is quite time you took some little interest in the estate. Your father, as you know, is useless. His library"—with a sudden cold sneer—"is his kingdom. There he dreams away his life in imaginary worlds——"

'In mouldy novels fancy sees
Aldines Bodonis, Elzevirs.'

He fancies there are priceless treasures on those dusty shelves of his."

"His mind to him a kingdom is," quotes Dick Bouverie, speaking for the first time. "Happy is the man who can retain his fancies—however foolish—when old age has caught him! Let my father enjoy his books in peace!"

"It is your part to ensure him that enjoyment," says Lady Bouverie, with ill-repressed sharpness. "If you attend to the accounts, or at least overlook Watkins now and then, there is no reason why your father should not moulder away with his books, unmolested by words of mine. All servants require a master's eye upon them."

"Have you got it, Dick?" asks Bruno, laughing. "Look at me till I see if I should quail before it. Very poor effect indeed! If I were you, I should grow one in my forehead; it would be far more imposing."

"I thought you said you were going to the stables, Bruno?" says his mother, regarding him with some disfavour.

"No; I am going to stay here and listen to you. The people with whom Fifa and I love to associate seldom drop pearls of wisdom from their lips. Do they, Fifa?"—to the terrier, who barks a loud "No," and lifts a foreleg in anxious expectation of another word of recognition.

"I hate farming and Watkins and the country generally," interposes Dick, with a gesture of dislike.

"Still, if your duty——"

"I hate that even more! What's the matter with Watkins? Why can't he go on alone in his management, as he has done for years?"

"There isn't anything the matter with him," interrupts Bruno, "beyond an oppressive smell of corduroy! He is quite well—no ailment of any sort, as far as I can see."

"He grows decidedly careless and in many ways unsatisfactory," says Lady Bouverie; "he is, in fact, too old for his post. If I had my way, he should be dismissed at once, and a younger—a more competent man—put in his place."

"But naturally you shrink from discharging one who has served you faithfully for over twenty years," says Bouverie, gravely, flicking a little speck of dust from his waistcoat.

A dull colour flames into his mother's cheeks. The latent antagonism that exists between her and her elder son springs into life at his words, and speaks through her angry eyes.

"You mistake me; I shrink at nothing!" she says, haughtily.

"It seems a pity," strikes in Bruno, judiciously, marking the signs of coming storm, "that my many

graces and speaking virtues should have induced my cousin, the admiral, to leave me that little place of mine, or I should have been delighted to give my talents to the overhauling of Watkins. I find him a very attractive old person, and rich in humour when I can understand him, which is seldom——”

“He can do nothing,” says Lady Bouverie, shortly.

“He can,—he can take snuff!” corrects her younger son, mildly. “I’d back him against any one at that. You underrate him, mother. You should at least”—reproachfully—“be just, and give the man his due.”

“I hope you mean to give up town this season,” says Lady Bouverie, addressing Dick. “It is now six months since you have been at home; you should spare us a little of your time. It is”—coldly—“for your own interest alone I speak. If, at your father’s death, you find things all at sixes and sevens, blame yourself, and remember I warned you.”

“Well, I’ll think it over,” returns Bouverie, discontentedly. “You relieve me, however, when you remind me that my carelessness will make myself only a sufferer. By-the-bye, I’m going down to the Hollows this afternoon. Any message for Audrey?”

“Say I shall be pleased if she will come up and dine with me to-night. I suppose it is only right I should show her some small civility at times,” says Lady Bouverie, with a half frown, “although she and I are so totally dissimilar in every way that she perpetually jars upon me. How she can be my niece and still possess her objectionable ways is and always will be to me a mystery. She will expect me, of course, to ask her here a little, now you and Bruno are at home.”

"I shall give her your message," says Dick, moving the rest of his body through the window on to the balcony without.

"As you will be passing Greylands," says Lady Bouverie, regarding him calmly, and speaking with the constrained air of one who is following up an afterthought, "I wish you would call upon Miss Maturin, and tell her I shall send down to-morrow those pelargoniums she spoke of yesterday."

"I shall remember," returns Bouverie, as, with his usual idle step, he goes down the stairs to the sward beneath.

"I'm rather glad that old place has got a mistress at last," remarks Bruno, pleasantly, as he too rises to pay his long-deferred visit to the stables, or the kennel, or somewhere.

"Yes; it is an advantage. It is too fine an old house to be let sink into decay, and moneyed people are always to be desired. We are not sufficiently rich ourselves to regard money with disdain, or, rather, to pretend to do so; and Richard, when he marries, should think of——" She pauses abruptly. "I hope he will not forget my message about those pelargoniums," she concludes, with careful carelessness.

"And I hope he will deliver it to the charming niece; don't you?" supplements Bruno, innocently, as he strolls out of the room, Fifa at his heels.

Meantime, Dick, sauntering slowly over the fields to the Hollows, where his cousin lives, with a frown upon his brow and an impatient light in his dark blue eyes—a light that kindles there all too readily beneath his mother's touch—is thinking of many things.

It is growing towards evening, and now at last a faint breeze has uprisen, flying inland from the sea-cliffs, full of fresh and salty sweetness, to dance merrily among the swaying branches of the trees. It wakes the drowsy birds to sudden life, and thrush and lark and linnet have all come forth to unite in one grand evensong that thrills through wood and vale and bosky dell.

“And in the close indomitable flowers,
A keen-edged odour of the sun and showers
Is as the smell of the fresh honeycomb
Made sweet for mouths of none but paramours.”

Upon the tennis-ground of the Hollows a girl is standing talking somewhat apathetically to a young man of the washed-out type. Seeing Bouverie advancing from under the limes, she says something to this polite nonentity that sends him racing, with all sails set, towards the house. She is a tall girl, with a pretty sweet figure, and a face that would be beyond reproach but for a certain touch of repressive pride and studied insolence—arising from education more than nature—that characterizes it. The eyes, large and of a pure hazel, look at one out of a haze of haughty doubt; the chin is determined, the hair of a lustrous brown. Poverty, mingled with the traditions of three hundred generations, has raised this cloud upon a brow that should be possessed of contentment only.

Just now she is advancing towards Dick with a firm step and a prepared smile, and a little involuntary curl about her handsome lips.

“Ah, my dear cousin—you?” she says, coming slowly up to him, her tone genial, her expression

belying her tone. "Why it is quite six months, I think, since last we met! I hope absence has not lessened your love for me?"

Her voice is peculiar—clear, distinct, and soft, yet with an echo in it full of mockery that falls upon the heart when the words have passed away.

"No," replies Bouverie, taking her proffered hand.

"Or increased it?" Here the mockery overrides the softness.

"No, since you demand the truth," says Bouverie again, not uncivilly, but with an indifference that might well anger any woman.

"You are candour itself," declares Miss Ponsonby, with a little laugh and a light shrug of her rounded shoulders. "Let me emulate you by telling you what is on my mind. It is—what brought you?"

"A message from my mother principally."

"To beg I will hold myself with greater dignity in church of a Sunday, and so set my father's pupils a worthy example?" asks she, with a little tremulous sneer. "Or is it a hope that I have sought to cure myself of my reprehensible habit of using slang words, 'unfit for any lady's use,' and evidently contracted of the aforesaid pupils?"

"Neither of these advices have been entrusted to me," says Bouverie, coldly. "Why are you always so hard upon my mother?"

But, even as he says this in a rather lofty manner, he reminds himself that he too has been harbouring hard thoughts in his mind during his walk hither.

"'I hate them that my vices tellë me, and so do more of us (God wot) than I!'" quotes the girl, with a little disdainful *moue*.

"Who were you talking to just now as I came up?" asks Bouverie, presently.

"Was I talking to anybody?"

"I certainly fancied so. I fancied too he went round that corner"—pointing to it—"as I came in sight."

"What an excellent chaperon you would make, Dick!" says his cousin, with suspicious admiration. "One feels positive regret that you should have so few opportunities of exercising your talent. You see,"—lifting her sombre eyes with a sudden flash to his—"I can't employ you, your mother being more than enough for me. She keeps not only her own eyes, but the eyes of all the neighbourhood, upon my every action."

"Still, you haven't told me about your new friend," persists Dick, unmoved. "See—here he comes! Now,"—without lowering his voice—"may I know who he is?"

"Certainly. One of Dad's boys."

At this "one of Dad's boys" stops short, blushes, and looks ineffable things; but, as is his wont, says nothing.

"Ah," says Bouverie, his eyes on the limp youth, who is uneasily shifting his lanky body from foot to foot beneath his steady gaze, "that is an excellent introduction, no doubt; but I think I should like one a little more formal."

"Too happy, I'm sure!" murmurs Dad's last boy in a milk-and-water tone, whilst trying to do impossible things with an eyeglass—a late purchase evidently, and dreadfully in the way.

"That is nonsense," says Miss Ponsonby, sharply.

"No one was ever too happy. However, if it will make you a joyful man to know you once looked on Dick Bouverie, be joyful! Are you ready for your introduction, Dick? Sir Chicksy Chaucer—Mr. Bouverie. Feel any thrill of bliss, Sir Chicksy?"

"Could hardly help that, you know—so near you—able to see you, you know, and—er—that!" chirrups Sir Chicksy, with a feeble attempt at gallantry.

"You will be able to see me a great deal better if you drop that insane bit of glass," says Miss Ponsonby, calmly. "What on earth did you buy it for—eh? You have the best sight of any one I know."

"Been long in the country, Sir Chicksy?" asks Bouverie, coming to the rescue; but Miss Ponsonby's last remark has overwhelmed Sir Chicksy and left him speechless.

"Oh, yes, a long time!" says his cousin, answering for her victim. "Ever so long—years, I think! You came last February, didn't you, Sir Chicksy?"

"Last April,—seems like yesterday to me," sighs the smitten baronet, with a reproachful glance at her. "Very glad indeed to—er—make your cousin's acquaintance. Any"—with a rush—"cousin of yours—er——" Heavy fall.

"Any cousin?" says Miss Ponsonby. "Will they all make you 'too happy?' Why, you will be surfeited with gladness! Very good; I'll send word to the lot. By-the-bye, where is that racket I sent you for a moment since? No? Oh, it *must* be where I said it was!"

"It isn't, indeed. Give you my word; I searched for it high and low," says Sir Chicksy, growing quite warm through fear of her increasing displeasure.

"Well, try the pantry. I know I had it in my hand yesterday, when I went there to speak to Mary."

"I didn't know you had such an old boy as that on the premises," says Dick, when Sir Chicksy has disappeared once more round the corner, with banners—that is, coat-tails—flying.

"That is because you have been so long away. You and Bruno so seldom visit your home that you give us time to quite forget you now and then."

"Not quite, I hope," protests Dick, politely but impolitely too—the want of interest in his face being only too apparent.

"Don't trouble yourself to make pretty speeches to me, Dick. I'll let you off," returns she, with a slight shrug and a peculiar smile.

"Well, I hope Dad's new boy will prove a credit to him," says Bouverie, with the air of one who is laboriously endeavouring to make conversation.

"Like Dad's old boy," says a fresh voice coming from behind them, "though misunderstood by all but 'Dad' himself! What, you, Dick, old chap? What good wind has blown you hither?"

"A cab and a down-train," replies Dick, turning with a friendly smile to the newcomer, a tall young man, of about thirty, with a square face, rather cynical lips, and chestnut hair.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Vyner, for the second time to-day," says Miss Ponsonby, holding out to him her hand. It is a beautiful hand, as fair and as cool as a lily. Bouverie stares at her.

"I thought Vyner was always Anthony to you?" he says.

"So he was," demurely. "But of late"—mimick-

ing her aunt's formal tones to perfection—"I have striven to conquer that deplorable habit I had fallen into of calling young gentlemen by their Christian names."

Both men smile.

"My mother sent you her love, and she hopes you will dine with her to-night," says Bouverie.

"How sweet of her! Are you sure you have delivered your message correctly? Are you certain of the 'love' part of it? I think I could do it better. 'Tell Audrey that if she will care to dine with me to-night—which I greatly doubt, my society being scarcely calculated to suit her—I shall be pleased.' Give her my love in return, however, and tell her I am sorry a severe and crushing headache will prevent my going to Kingmore this evening."

"Oh, do come; you may as well!" says her cousin. "Bruno is at home to-night; it won't be quite so slow for you."

"Why?" asks Vyner, knocking the ash off his cigar. "Is Bruno the one in favour now?"

"I confess to a weakness for Bruno," says Audrey. "But indeed," lifting her dark eyes to his, "you are all so high in my favour, I could not put one before the other. Still no, I shall not leave Dad to-night."

"Happy Sir Chicksy!" murmurs Mr. Vyner, innocently.

"It was Dad I spoke of; but, if you will, yes. I shall stay here with him and Sir Chicksy," says the girl, just a little defiantly.

"And a very nice entertaining boy he is to stay with," returns Mr. Vyner, with suspicious cordiality. "Having been frequently in his society of late, I may

be considered qualified to speak. He is quite an antique in his way,—a bit of old English, like his name. By-the-bye, has he inherited any of the talent of his great namesake? Taken any rides to Canterbury—eh?”

“No,” says Miss Ponsonby, rather shortly. She has drawn herself up, and is looking at him with a slight frown on her low brow.

“Tastes are unaccountable, we all know,” remarks Bouverie, carelessly; “yet I should have thought any girl would prefer Bruno to that callow youth I saw just now.”

“Remember how often you have told me I am unlike most girls; and to me Sir Chicksy at present is preferable. He is newer, and therefore better fun.”

“Isn’t it hard to know any one?” says Mr. Vyner, with an air of deep surprise. “He doesn’t look funny! Sad, I’d call it. Here he is, by Jove, and full of go, as usual!

‘He comes, he comes, with his flashing eyes,
And his cheek of passion’s hue!’ ”

This quotation is most unfortunately apt, as Sir Chicksy comes panting up to them breathless, and as rubicund as a peony.

“I’ve got it!” he says, waving the lost racket triumphantly above his head, and smiling broadly. “Not such a bad messenger, after all, am I?”

“Bad! The very best!” says Miss Ponsonby, suddenly and most unexpectedly bestowing upon him one of her rare smiles. It carries Sir Chicksy into the seventh heaven, where he remains for a considerable time. Not that his goddess follows him there. She

moves a little apart from the three men, and, stooping, picks up a ball or two lying near her on the tennis-court. As she bends and rights herself again, it is impossible not to mark the extreme grace and beauty of her lissome figure. She is dressed in a style slightly *bizarre*, but very pretty; and, though there is nothing about her costume to detract from the careful charm of it, still there is something that suggests the idea that new gowns with her are few and far between.

Mr. Vyner's eyes, as she picks up the balls, follow her intently—not lovingly—simply curiously, and with that air of studying, of striving to master the secret workings of the hearts of those with whom he finds himself in contact that distinguishes him.

"That's a very pretty gown you've got on," he says, presently, without enthusiasm, whereupon Sir Chicksy—who has been wildly, but vainly, endeavouring to float on a conversational sea with Bouverie—turns a murderous eye on him.

"I'm glad you like it," says Audrey, indifferently; "you will the less soon tire of it. As it is my latest, you are likely to see a good deal of it before it finds a worthy successor."

As she makes this candid avowal, she laughs a little bitterly.

"'Long may it wave' then," says Vyner, cheerfully.

"I must be off!" exclaims Bouverie, looking at his watch. "You won't change your mind, Audrey, and come up to dinner, after all?" He says this earnestly.

"And so help you to get through a monotonous evening?" returns the girl, carelessly throwing her balls

into the air and catching them again. "No," with a shrug, "I would do a few things for you, but not that."

Bouverie laughs in spite of himself.

"You would have been a help, I confess," he says, lightly. "Will you come to the rescue, Vyner? Does the *mater* frighten you?"

"Your invitation comes too late," says Mr. Vyner, with dignity. "You offended me half-an-hour ago by ignoring my existence. Now I have made up my mind to dine with Dad and Sir Chicksy."

"You can't indeed," declares Miss Ponsonby, hurriedly, letting her balls reach the sward unheeded: "it is quite impossible—quite!"

"Nothing is impossible! I'm all alone at Moorlands this evening; and, as you well know, I can't endure my own society. It is useless your regarding me with that forbidding frown, Miss Ponsonby, because I won't take a denial. I shall appeal to Dad himself if you refuse me a hearing, and he will certainly treat me as I deserve."

"You cannot dine to-night!" says Audrey, with emphasis. "For one thing," colouring warmly all through her pale clear skin, "there is only cold mutton for dinner."

"Is it a loin?" unmoved.

"Yes," unwillingly.

"Then I shall stay. If there is one thing for which I have a settled hankering, it is a loin of mutton cold; besides," lowering his voice, "you have so whetted my curiosity about Sir Chicksy—described him in such glowing colours as a wit and all that—that I am bent on improving his acquaintance."

"You are bent on nothing of the kind!" angrily.

"I am indeed. Do you think, if I ask him to Moorlands for the grouse, he will promise not to shoot himself? I may come to dinner, may I not?"

"Oh, you can come if you like!" returns she, ungraciously.

"Then I must go home disconsolate," says Dick, "and listen all through dinner to diatribes against the servants, uttered before their faces, an ordeal greater than which I know not one. Good-by, Audrey; I hope this cruelty will be forgiven you! By-the-bye, you won't refuse to come to us on the nineteenth, at least, will you?"

"To Aunt Maria's dance?"

"Yes. It ought to be a success! My mother, poor soul, has taken such pains about it, though why she can't go to town in the season, and give her 'At homes' in a rational manner, I can't conceive."

"I shall be at her irrational one, at all events. The duchess is to be there, is she not? And I quite long to find myself for once face to face with a real live 'big D.' My acquaintance with them up to this has been confined to that charming lady in 'Alice in Wonderland,' who dandled a pig."

"I'm glad you'll come," says Dick, "though I won't swear you will enjoy yourself. My mother believes herself irresistible; but I hardly know any one so universally unpopular. Is it her misfortune or her fault?"

He is talking now exclusively to Audrey, Mr. Vyner having engaged himself in a desperate argument, hopeless of termination, with the terrified Sir Chicksy.

"Far be it from me to decide so delicate a point,"

says Miss Ponsonby, with lowered lids, and an untranslatable smile. "Good-evening, Dick, if you must go so soon. You leave at least one regret behind you."

"And that is?"

"That you cannot induce Mr. Vyner to accompany you."

"Very poor, very poor indeed!" says Mr. Vyner, with open contempt. "It would take thrice that to make me forego the cold loin and—Sir Chicksy."

"Oh, I knew the hint would be useless!" retorts Miss Ponsonby, with a contemptuous gesture.

"Well, good-by again, sweet coz," says Dick, lightly. "I am off to fulfil a second mission. Let us hope I shall be more successful in that than in my first."

"The gods grant it," says Audrey, piously.

"Where are you going, Dick?" asks Vyner.

"To 'Castle Dangerous'—that is, to Greylands, where Venus embodied lives, as I hear."

"Ah! To see Miss Lorne! Well, you won't be disappointed; she is as lovely as a dream! I saw her yesterday."

"A good reason for seeing her again to-day. Walk so far with me, Anthony."

"Can't, my dear boy. Must stay here, as I told you already, to pick up Miss Ponsonby's balls and such sparks of wisdom as fall from the erudite lips of Sir Chicksy. Cultivate the talented at all risks, that is an undeviating rule with me."

"Till we meet again, then!" says Bouverie, fading swiftly out of sight.

CHAPTER III.

“From the depths of the green garden-closes,
Where the summer in darkness dozes,

* * * * *

How red was the reign of the roses
Over the rose-crowned land!”

SWINBURNE.

A SHORT walk across the sunny meadows brings him to the gates of the Hollows.

“Beastly bore my mother’s insisting on my taking a message here, to people of whom I know nothing, nor wish to know,” he mutters to himself, as he stands outside the gate, hesitating about demanding an admittance.

“Freshly painted, by Jove,” he says, regarding the decent gate with scorn, “and the grass gone from the avenue! What a difference a brush and a scraper can accomplish! I’d hardly know the old place now. What a number of years it is since I went through this gate! Never since old Jasper’s time, and never then, I think. A short cut through the high grass and the hanging branches was more in my line at ten! Let’s see if I could feel like ten now, and if that side-wood”—with a half laugh—“and that rustic gate leading into the garden, still sniff of paradise.”

Turning aside from the principal entrance, he follows the road a little higher up until he comes to a wooden stile; springing over this, he finds himself

knee-deep in scented clover, with a vision of leafy shade beyond. Reaching the wooded hollow on the left, he plunges into its mystic recesses with a faint, faint return of the old boyish delight in its glories that once held him captive, and even now awakens a thrill of keenest pleasure in his breast. Short-lived, however; years and the world's scorching touch have killed the freshness that could once find joy prolonged in the secrets of mysterious Nature.

Even as the perfumed branches press down to bar his path, and myriad forest-flowers cry out for notice in the gathering twilight, his mind reverts with an angry impatience to his mother's last hints and innuendoes.

To ask a fellow to spend his entire summer buried alive in a hole of a place like this! Could there be anything more unreasonable? But women and reason were two! That he had known to his cost for many a day, be the woman mother, or cousin, or——

He had told himself before leaving town that he was doing quite the part of the model son in acceding to her request that he would be present at her dance on the nineteenth, given in honour of the duchess, who was a sort of thirty-first cousin of his father. The duchess, for some inscrutable reason, had elected to go down to her place in Blankshire, about ten miles from Kingmore, at this unholy time, missing her season point-blank, to the astonishment of all her friends. He had indeed felt he had done a good deal in the filial line when he too had gone down to Blankshire, meaning to stay a week or ten days at the outside, and now he finds himself let in for a visit extending

over an indefinite period. And what the deuce does he know of accounts, or Watkins—or——

There is that dinner at Richmond to which he is almost bound. And, *autres mœurs*, that dance at Lady Millefleur's; and the time running short now! Well, a week of accounts ought to mean a good many figures, and this is only the fourteenth, and the last week of June and first of July are never half so bad—and—and of course "duty" is a beastly word, especially when thrust upon one in that uncompromising fashion; but with a sigh he acknowledges this, it means something in the long run; and a man, if he wants to keep straight at all, must have some chart by which to steer.

These glimpses into a profound morality bring him to a small rustic gate studded with iron nails, sunk in a high wall. There are two steps leading up to it, and, as he mounts them and pushes it open, one can see that still six more steps must be ascended before the garden beyond is reached. Closing the small gate gently behind him, Bouverie, with a relapse into his former dreamy state—born of the old happy days when he was a boy, and their memories—springs lightly up the inner steps, and, looking straight before him, sees not ten paces from him something that dispels all boyish visions, something most sweet, most fair, and rich in grace and beauty.

A little rose-red hammock swung by silken ropes, a childish form lost in lazy tranquil slumber, with, upon its bosom, a great cluster of pale blossoms that rise and fall with the coming and going of the breath that stirs the heart beneath, a sense of pure blue sky that falls through the netted tangle of the branches

overhead, a singing of many birds, the fond murmur of a distant stream, and, over and through all these, the rush of a satin wind, laden heavy with the perfume of the innumerable roses that throng this enchanted corner of our lovely world.

Lightly too this scented wind is rocking to and fro the crimson bed; but still its little, pale, fair occupant unconscious lies. Bouverie seeing this, his latest, sweetest vision, moveth not, draws nearer, nearer still, until he is gazing down upon the sleeping marvel, so strangely found. Her long dark lashes lie motionless upon her cheek, flushed delicately, her lips are slightly parted; one arm, half bare, is flung above the shapely head, the other lies languidly, lost among the scattered flowers upon her breast, the slender fingers still sleepily clutching the rosebuds they had been holding when consciousness departed.

So pure, so fragile seems the sudden vision that Bouverie, afraid to stir lest the faintest sound should drive it from him for ever, stands mute before it wondering. There is a calm beauty about the tranquil face that fascinates him. Unbidden comes to him the thought—

“That, as of light the summer sunnë sheen,
Passeth the star, right so over measure,
She fairer is than any creature.”

Then, all in a moment, as he stands spell-bound, fearing to withdraw, lest he disturb her, yet doubting his right to stand here and admire without let, or hindrance, or permission, so fair a thing, the soft white lids uprise, and two eyes, “sweetest eyes were ever seen,” look calmly into his. Vaguely they look at first, and in nowise coldly, he being as yet but a fragment

of the wild dream she has just left; then, with wide lids and growing knowledge, she stares at him, and, rising on her dainty elbow, lets amazement have full sway, and something else too, that might perhaps be termed indignant wrath in one with lips and eyes less sweet.

"How did you come here?" she asks, in a low clear voice; there is surprise largely mingled with the grave displeasure in her face.

"By this gate," says Dick Bouverie, quailing beneath the severity of those searching eyes. "I used to come into the garden by it long ago when I was a little fellow, in your—your fa—your uncle's time. I forgot I was trespassing."

There is abject humility in his tone and expression; but the lady of the hammock refuses to be softened.

"This is my own garden; no one comes here without my permission," she says, austere.

"I—I might have asked for permission certainly," says Dick, vaguely; "but I didn't know. I——"

"It would have been of no use; I wish to be alone here always!" she says, with distinct meaning. "But the mistake is in part my own, of course; yet I was quite sure I had turned the key in the lock."

"No, there was no key at all," says Dick. "But, of course, that is nothing. I should not have come here; I should have remembered I could not come in and out now as I used when I was a boy."

"Was everybody in this neighbourhood in the habit of coming here when you were a boy?" demands she, increasing anger in her eyes.

"Oh, no! And some of us were girls then," says Dick, demurely, but without daring to smile.

She regards him fixedly for a full minute, as though haughtily suspecting him of undue levity, and then, with a sudden light movement, springs to the ground.

"I am Dolores Lorne!" she says, standing erect before him, with her pretty head up-drawn, as though to let him see who is mistress in this territory.

Dolores! What a sad little name! With a pang—even in this early moment of their acquaintance it is with a distinct pang—he feels that in some vague indefinite fashion the name suits her.

"And I am Dick Bouverie," returns he, "and very, very sorry I disturbed you."

"I believe that. And now," coldly, "you can go if you like."

"I don't like. I can't bear to go away without your forgiveness," says Dick, with such an amount of earnestness in eyes and voice as verifies his words and speaks for the depth of his contrition.

"Oh, well you may have that!" she says, looking down. "And then—if—if your name is—Dick Bouverie, I suppose it was your mother who called here yesterday?"

"Did she call?" says Dick, who knows well she did, but, through very longing to hear again the low *traînant* voice, pretends ignorance. And why had she brought up this question about his mother? Perhaps to soften the cruelty of her dismissal, perhaps—oh, goodly thought!—to do away with the dismissal altogether!

"I think it must have been your mother," says Dolores, reflectively, tapping her red lips with her forefinger in meditative fashion. "A tall woman—very tall, with—I mean—that is"—quick confusion covering her

as she thinks of what she had so nearly said—"I mean a very tall woman!"

This is distinctly lame.

"Your description is perfect—a very tall woman, with an enormous nose," says Mr. Bouverie, sublime gravity marking every feature.

At this she grows red, and glances at him shyly from under her curling lashes, and looks down again, and up again, and finally they both burst out laughing. Laughter at their age is a quick road to friendship; but Dolores is not as yet prepared to hold out the right hand of fellowship. She checks her merriment, and stands back from him a little step or two, and clasps her hands behind her.

"I think you had better come in and see auntie," she says, with increased dignity, "that is, if indeed you meant to pay her a visit this evening," glancing at him suspiciously.

"Certainly I meant it. I came here purposely to see her, with a message from my mother about pelargoniums."

"What about them?"

"Well, that's just it, you see," says Dick, with a confiding smile. "I haven't the faintest idea. I assure you I knew all about it the very moment before—before I entered this garden; but it is all gone out of my head now. Was she to offer your aunt some, or was your aunt to give her some? She told me she had called, and——"

"I thought," turning large convicting eyes upon him, "you said just now—or at least you gave me the impression—that you did not know your mother had been here at all?"

"Did I? You see—there it is again! I've got such a wretched memory," says Dick, mournfully. "At least I have now, I hadn't this morning! It must be something in the air of your garden."

"Don't scold my garden! It has the sweetest air on earth," says Dolores, with decision; "and see—there is auntie standing in the window. Come to her."

With all the demeanour of one escorting a condemned felon to the gibbet, she leads him towards that open window of the drawing-room, where a tall dark figure can be descried looking in their direction. A few stone steps lead from the terrace to the verandah, and up these perforce Mr. Bouverie follows his captor.

"I have brought you a trespasser, auntie," says this last awful personage, slipping her hand through Miss Maturin's arm and confronting Dick with a menacing air. "I found him in my own grounds, without permission, and——"

"I think it was I found you," interposes Mr. Bouverie, mildly. But his weak attempt at defence is treated with contempt.

"He could give no proper account of himself," says his gaoler, sternly, "so I have brought him to you, to do with him as seemeth good in thine eyes."

"Don't be hard on me, Miss Maturin," says Dick, advancing. "I have been so browbeaten and generally frowned down already that I have little resistance left in me. I can just barely remember that my name is Bouverie; but beyond that—my mind is a blank."

"Nay, then, I think you have been punished enough," says Miss Maturin, smiling. "Come in, and let us be-

gin our acquaintance under more auspicious circumstances."

"That means under the shadow of the tea-tray," says Miss Lorne, saucily, turning upon Dick a sudden bright smile that puts formality and unfriendliness to flight at once and for ever.

It is a very pretty room they enter, smelling sweetly of gay Indian mattings. Quaint tables and chairs are scattered broadcast, and Persian rugs of divers colours lie here and there. There are two large Sèvres bowls filled with roses, cream and white and yellow, and a few red, a still fewer blue monsters standing on carved cabinets, with gaping jaws and goggle eyes; some Nankin china; some hideous Hindu idols, a few choice modern water-colours on the painted walls, and a good many Eastern and European gimcracks of one sort or another, mixed up in a charming confusion all over the place.

"And where did you find Dolores?" asks Miss Maturin presently, when she has found out that he does like sugar and is very fond of cream. But he is not allowed to answer.

"In my own garden—my sanctuary," says the mistress of that sacred spot. "I was in my hammock, breathing the air of heaven, and lost in dreams"—with a little quaint dramatic action of her hand—"when he came to me."

"I'm glad of that—glad that you found her resting, I mean," says Miss Maturin, tenderly. "She runs about too much, Mr. Bouverie; she over-exerts herself. For one moment in the day she will not be still. I have had that hammock put up on purpose for her, that she might take a little rest now and then."

"Miss Lorne is not without rest to-day, at least," says Dick. "I found her sound asleep in that self-same hammock."

"Asleep! In the open air! Oh, Dolores, I hope not!" says her aunt, with quick dismay. "You know how delicate your chest is, and to sleep in the open air! Dear child, how careless of you!"

"It was but for a little moment"—penitently—"and indeed I don't know how it happened; but I was lying there blinking at the hot sun as he glanced at me through the rustling leaves, and somehow I lost myself in a day-dream, and a little lulling wind came to me across the roses, and then I knew nothing more until my day-dream became a real one. A short one, though, because some kindly fairy whispered to me that an ogre had entered my land; and so I awoke."

"An ogre! Alas, Miss Lorne! Have I deserved all this?"

"Well," with sweet relenting, "I will confess to you, I was going to say a prince; but I didn't think"—mischievously—"you deserved all that!"

"If Mr. Bouverie was the one to release you from that treacherous slumber—so sure to give you cold—I, for one, not only forgive him his trespass, but thank him sincerely for his well-timed arrival," says Miss Maturin.

"After all, I believe I am grateful to him too," declares Dolores, lightly. "My dream was of an evil thing, and I was glad to be rescued from it. Was I," turning to Bouverie, "frowning when you saw me first, as though frightened—or——"

"No; on the contrary, you seemed to be enjoying the sleep of the just."

"I should have looked distressed, I think; I felt it. How," with childish curiosity, "did I look then?"

"As though you dreamt of heaven," says Bouverie, with such grave and sudden earnestness that it almost seems as if the words come from him without volition on his part. Dolores, as though startled, turns her eyes to his; something she sees there shortens her gaze, and the faintest tinge of crimson creeps beneath the cream white of her skin. Her long lashes flicker shyly, and then her eyes droop.

"She stood, and hung her visage down a-low."

Bouverie, angry with himself in a vague manner about something he barely understands, looks out of the window upon the fast-falling twilight that is dusk-ing all the land and casting a grey mantle over the pale ocean down below.

Meanwhile, Miss Maturin—who has seen nothing—is talking to a "disgracefully absent audience."

"That is where your dreams should come from," she is saying, pleasantly, her heart in her words, her eyes on the cream-ewer. "All a pretty maiden's dreams should come straight from the skies."

"Mine came from some other place," says Dolores, whose faint troubled thought has vanished. "It was a cruel vision, so slight, so shadowy, I could not grasp or put it into words even if I would; but still I know it was framed by Evil."

"Tut, you silly child! What should you have to do with such a word? It should be unknown to you," says Miss Maturin, fondly. "Dreams are but reproductions of our thoughts and actions in one form or another. They are shaped obscurely from our sur-

roundings. Now, from what corner of your life could you call forth a troubled recollection?"

"And yet it oppressed me," says the girl, dreamily. "I seemed," slowly putting out one hand, "going—going—parting from all I loved—sinking into—No, I cannot recall it—I will not"—with a quick shudder—"yet I know it prophesied trouble. And—your own words, auntie," with a swift glance at her—"we must all know that, must we not?"

"Not all," says Bouverie, impulsively; yet, as he says it, a cold wave seems to rush across his heart. Does there in the mysterious future live a day when he shall see those soft, clear eyes dull with grief's knowledge—those warm, red lips pale and cold, the whole fair, lovely face haggard with a torment that knows no hope?

"Yes—all," says Dolores, slowly "Ask auntie."

"No, no!" murmurs Miss Maturin, nervously.

"There is no rule without an exception," declares Dick, gaily. "Let you"—to Dolores—"be the brilliant one." He laughs; but to any one intimate with him it would be known that his gaiety costs him an effort. "My mother, for example, is another. She has had an uncommon good life, taking it altogether; trouble and she, so far, have been anything but friends."

"Then her time is yet to come—as is mine," persists Dolores, with a smile that half kills the fatality of her words.

"If you get through as much of your life as my mother has of hers without coming to grief, you won't have much to complain of," retorts Bouverie, with a persistence almost as keen as her own.

"Yet she cannot escape altogether, if there be

justice meted out," says the girl, shaking her head prophetically; "and in truth I do not deem her so entirely fortunate. For myself, I should wish my miseries, if they are to be, to come early, so as to have them over before night descended. Of your grace"—glancing at Bouverie, with a soft laugh—"pray that for me. The worst evil, to my thinking, that could befall me would be to find myself in my old age—if indeed, which may not be, that old age be mine—cut off from hope and gladness and content. Let sorrow, if it is to be, come to me now, when I am young and strong to bear."

"What are you saying, Dolores?" exclaims Miss Maturin, rising suddenly from the tiny spindle-legged table on which the tea-tray is set. "What have you got to do with sorrow, or pain, or death? Forget such things, and think only of the sun, the flowers, and your friends the singing-birds! Do not tempt Fate to shower upon you his worst gifts."

"That hammock is badly slung. I am sure of it," says Bouverie, lightly. "If Miss Lorne is unlike herself to-day, I am, of course"—hesitating—"too new an *acquaintance* to mark a difference in her; but, if——"

"Nay, say what you first intended," interrupts Miss Maturin, giving him one of her kindest smiles. "A friend, I hope you will be to us."

"A certainty leaves no room for hope," returns he, gracefully.

There is to him an irrepressible charm in the calm, slow tones and kindly glances of the elder woman—a sense of rest too, and a knowledge of sure help in

time of need, in the quiet power of her dark, handsome face.

"At what shrine did you learn your courtly phrases?" asks Dolores, with a would-be scornful glance. All clouds have vanished from her face; she is again the gay, happy, debonair child of a moment since.

"You are a saucy baby!" says Miss Maturin, lovingly. "Do not heed her, Mr. Bouverie; but if you have still half an hour or so to spare us, fill your pockets with those biscuits there, and come with us to feed our swans."

CHAPTER IV.

“Of all things tired thy lips look weariest.”

SWINBURNE.

OUT of the garish day into the cool sweet night, clad with its myriad stars! The windows are all thrown wide, and from within the sound of the plaintive fiddling creeps through them to mingle with the many harmonies that thrill the heart of Nature in the dark depths of the sleeping garden—the rush of tumbling streams, the faint drip of lazy fountains, the sad music of the distant lap-lapping of the waves upon the lonely shore.

Coloured lamps are shedding pale tints of red and yellow upon the indecorous limbs of the gods and goddesses who are gleaming snow-white in the moonlight that riots in glade and bower and dell.

It is the evening of the nineteenth, and the rooms at Kingmore are filled to overflowing; so are the staircases, so are the flower-decked antechambers and the scented conservatories. The duchess, who is in an exceptionally gracious mood and quite on her best behaviour—her eldest girl having consented to throw away her youth upon a modern if mouldy Cræsus—has arrived early, and is now making herself charming to every one she knows; and indeed, without meaning it, to many she doesn't, her glasses being but a snare

to her and her memory for her country acquaintances but short.

She is dressed in a mustard-coloured gown and a most remarkable—but doubtless “distinctly precious”—head-gear of daffodils, the originals of which assuredly never grew either in earth or heaven. She is a huge woman, with a not unpleasing face, and quite casts Lady Bouverie, beside whom she is standing, into shade by right of her superior proportions.

“I can’t bear those divided skirts!” she is saying, with great acrimony, directing a severe gaze at a distant corner of the room, where a young woman who has found herself unexpectedly alone in her “short division” is wishing herself dead. “The princess is especially hard on them. But see there,” waving her fan towards the doorway, “who is that just entering? A charming face—charming!”

The owner of the charming face, advancing somewhat haughtily up the room, murmurs some cold word or two to Lady Bouverie and then moves on.

“What grace, what finish!” says the duchess, admiringly, whose own daughters have a fatal tendency towards hoydenism. “She is——”

“My niece,” says Lady Bouverie, coldly—“Audrey Ponsonby. You know her father,—my brother—I think; but you are so seldom at home that I daresay you never saw her before.”

“Well, I think not. I shouldn’t have forgotten her if I had,” says the duchess, pleasantly. “You are fortunate in possessing so desirable a niece; she must be like a daughter to you.”

“I am quite content with my sons. I have no

desire for a daughter, and in no case should I covet Audrey," replies Lady Bouverie, stiffly.

"Ah," her Grace nods slowly, "I have often heard that hazel-eyed people are never very comfortable! But she has a face that would do for Kate Hardcastle nicely, or even for Lydia Languish."

She falls a-musing after this curious speech, and follows Audrey's departing figure with thoughtful eyes.

"I fear indeed she is more stagey than dignified," says Lady Bouverie, with a subdued sneer.

To her the girl is utterly distasteful. There is a certain sense of insolence in the very droop of Audrey's lashes, an unexpressed yet open determination to revolt at any moment against the would-be authority of her aunt, that is known to Lady Bouverie, and galls her at times more than she would care to acknowledge even to herself. An indomitable will, matched against another more indomitable still, breeds ill-will; and Lady Bouverie, accustomed to carry all before her on her own ground, takes it badly that this motherless chit of a girl—as poor as she is fractious—should decline to lay down her arms before her. Her poverty is in itself a crime, because it is a poverty that rubs itself persistently against Lady Bouverie and claims kinship with her. Unkind fortune had made this girl's father her brother; and to have almost at one's gates a brother compelled to educate boys and young men as a means towards gaining his daily bread is as a thorn in the flesh of her whom chance has lifted beyond such sordid considerations as the possible non-payment of one's butcher or baker, or the consequences to follow on the spending of a shilling more or less.

Had Providence so ordered it that Mr. Ponsonby's lines had been laid in places far remote from Deadmarsh, Lady Bouverie would have felt devoutly grateful to Providence, and would have submitted to its will with an un murmuring resignation; but Providence so far had forgotten to humour her prejudices, and Mr. Ponsonby ground Greek and Latin and conic sections into the ears of his pupils within a mile or so of the sacred precincts of Kingmore.

Lady Bouverie would gladly have forgotten all those early beggarly days when she too had struggled with an insufficient income, and had to think many times before permitting herself the extravagance of a new gown. These were days in which Sir George—then only Mr. Bouverie and a second son, and by no means weighed down with wealth—had been considered as a blessed chance of escape from the petty worries of a straitened household; but now—well, now she is Lady Bouverie by a fortuitous accident, and even to be reminded of that moneyless unpleasant past is hateful to her. She had, by her own exertions and the aid of Sir George—to his everlasting regret be it said—lifted herself from her depressing surroundings to a very much higher estate; and now to be reminded of them daily by this insolent girl and her gentle but scarcely less aggravating father is bitter indeed to the ambitious woman. With eyes askance, she has gone through life glancing at Audrey, the girl's independent ways and scornful determination to reject all patronage having angered the older woman past forgiveness. Indeed, Audrey's dislike to her aunt has spread as far as her aunt's sons; and, though to Bruno she grants a half-hearted friendship, she is in spirit

unjust to Dick. Between her and him there is ever a smouldering feud likely to burst into flame at any moment.

Thus unsupported by those who should be her natural protectors, Audrey's strange repellent ways have gained her few friends in the neighbourhood. Life in Deadmarsh—as this part of the country is called—is not easy to the pretty, or to those imbued with that lightest art of nature named coquetry. One must hardly dare here to enjoy oneself without reserve. Laughter must be subdued, originality of speech or thought suppressed, marked action eschewed. To be good is to be decorously dull; there must be no consenting to idle admiration from the opposite sex—no flaunting of the obnoxious fact that this one can command attention where other people's daughters cannot.

There is no place like a small country circle for utter tyranny of this sort; where a narrowed society lives in a religion of its own and looks upon all outside the pale of its paltry convictions as among those who have gone over to false gods—pariahs of the lowest order—scarce fit to be the possessors of a soul! The divine liberality, that travel and a healthful knowledge of our sad world brings, is rare in the orthodox country-side. Running (if not too fast) is not forbidden, but it must be in the groove wherein all others run. To dig out a path for oneself is to call down condemnation on one's head.

Miss Ponsonby, now and then preferring a pathway of her own, is regarded with great disfavour by her neighbours, and indeed it cannot be said that she has in any way sought to propitiate their ill-will, certain caustic words of hers that have been bandied

from mouth to mouth having scarcely tended to enhance her popularity. There was, for instance, that saucily veiled hint about Mrs. Drummond's father, who had had undoubtedly a good deal to do with sugar. "Sweets to the sweet," said Audrey to Mrs. Drummond's bosom friend the vicar's wife, speaking directly of Mrs. Drummond, with a broader word or two still here and there that left no doubt on the hearer's mind that sugar was the "sweet" more particularly meant. The vicar's wife, Mrs. Dovedale, being of a communicative turn of mind, and herself of unexceptionable birth—her father a fourth baronet—had, with much unction and uplifting of brows and the greatest delicacy and hesitation, retailed to her friend all that Audrey had said, and a little more; whereon dire hatred for Audrey had sprung to life in Mrs. Drummond's breast. There had been other things said by Audrey too that had come home to those who should not have heard them, with additions that a rolling stone will always gather.

More especially to the matrons, mothers of unmarried girls, is Audrey a *bête noire*. Ugly girls, silent girls, silly girls, who line the walls in pathetic loneliness whilst she dances, or sit in hopeless isolation over dull albums after duller dinners, watching Audrey with sullen envy where in some distant part of the room she is commanding the homage of half a dozen men, each one of whom would think himself doubly fortunate if by that indescribable movement of the hand, which pretty women know, she should draw her skirts aside and permit him the uncomfortable edge of the ottoman on which she may be seated. For those great lambent hazel eyes, half insolent, half

satiric, have a power to charm the ungentler sex that lesser, milder beauties lack.

"Is there any hope that I may get a dance from you to-night?" asks Mr. Vyner, emerging from a curtained recess as Audrey passes by on the arm of a young and let us hope gallant Plunger.

For an instant she hesitates; then—

"You can have the next," she says, slowly, a half tone of unwillingness in the sweet petulance of her voice.

"The next is a quadrille. Do you call that a dance?"

"No? Better not have it, then."

"'Half a loaf,'" suggests he, cheerfully. "Yes, I will have it, though I must consider it the shabbiest bit of dough. Hark to the opening bars! Let us fly from them."

She lays her hand mechanically upon his arm, lets a stray indifferent smile wander towards the obliterated Plunger that alights somewhere upon his coat, and finally finds herself in a cool retreat on a velvet lounge, with Mr. Vyner beside her.

"You were early to-night," he says, as an introductory opening to the coming *tête-à-tête*.

Few people like to be told they have arrived early at any gathering; but Miss Ponsonby, if this remark annoys her, makes no sign.

"I meant to be late," she answers, absently; "but Sir Chicksy was dreadfully in earnest. He is young, you see. A dance is still something to him."

"A dance with you, I daresay."

"Then Dad was fidgety, too. He is always in such excellent time himself"—with a short laugh—

"that he naturally likes to see others up to the mark as well."

"Have I lived to hear you sneer at Dad?" asks Vyner, with an assumption of tragic astonishment.

A moment later he is sorry for his words. The girl flushes a painful crimson, and for an instant the proud lips quiver.

"*Sneer at Dad!*" she says, with angry haste. "What do you mean?"

"I beg your pardon," says Vyner.

"Never say that to me again," exclaims she, with a flash from her handsome eyes. "Do you hear? You are the last who should say it or think it." Then her sudden grief or passion, whichever it was, dies away, and her face grows even paler than before. "How charming Mrs. Wemyss is looking to-night!" she says, with such calm every-day carelessness as startles him after her late burst of vehemence.

"That might be said of half a dozen people—of you, for example; it is no great thing to say."

"Her costume at least is beyond reproach."

"Is it? A little pronounced, perhaps; but of course widows can allow themselves a good deal of license. For my own part, I prefer yours."

"Mine?" She glances down at her dress and smiles contemptuously. "Why, this gown is an heirloom!" she says, with a faintly bitter smile. "All the county knows it by this time. No," quickly, as though fearing or guessing some thought of his, "Dad would give me another—twenty others if he could; but he can't simply. We are savages, he and I; we live upon the boys, and even they scarcely suffice us. I don't know why I tell

you all this; you knew it so well before; you should, having been a boy of Dad's yourself once."

"And a very grateful boy, too, for a few other things beside the fact that I have escaped from his and *your* cannibal clutches whole and entire. But why abuse your personal appearance? I see no one in the room to-night who looks better dressed than you do."

"What a pity it is that, to be agreeable, one must so often be a liar!" says Miss Ponsonby, slowly flicking her fan to and fro.

"What a dear little speech!" retorts Vyner; and then he laughs.

A small fountain somewhere behind them is dropping musically into its basin; a cool wind is rushing through an open window. Miss Ponsonby, still idling prettily with her fan, no doubt appreciates to the full the enjoyment of the moment, because no words fall from her to break their spell.

"You have carried me back somehow to the old days," says Vyner, presently. "Just now it seems to me that I can see you again as you used to be when quite a little girl, with long, soft hair almost down to your toes, and eyes a great deal too large for your face."

"What a fetching picture!"

"It was, very. One seldom sees anything like it now; but, though you were pretty, I don't think you were quite a nice little girl."

"No; I know I wasn't—to *you*. How I hate those quadrilles from 'Madame Angot!' Don't you?"

"You used to tyrannize over me abominably."

"That need not trouble you, seeing I can't tyrannize over you now."

"It is not poetical justice, however. To have things properly balanced, I should be able to tyrannize over you by this time."

"Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere," quotes she, with a cold smile.

"You are still a tyrant, then?"

"At least, I would not submit."

"Do you remember that day in the orchard," asks Vyner presently, with a laugh of irrepressible enjoyment, "when I was supposed to be doing Euclid, but was in reality stealing apples for you, and Dad came in and caught us; and—— By Jove, how long ago it all seems now!"

"So long that it has entirely slipped from my memory. There were so many boys off and on, and so many of them stole apples for me."

"Well, they were pleasant days enough, even though you decline to grant them the small courtesy of a passing remembrance. We were very good friends then, you and I. Do you know"—glancing deliberately at her—"I think I used to be in love with you then?"

"I'm very thankful the folly did not grow beyond the 'then,'" says Miss Ponsonby, raising her lids languidly and gazing at him with a full insolent glance.

"So am I, for some reasons. It would hardly have suited either of us, would it?"

"It would not have suited me, certainly."

"Not *now*; then, at least, you tolerated me. It is absurd, almost presumptuous to remember it. But do you know in those bygone days," says Vyner, lightly, "I used to call you my 'little wife?' Happy Arcadian days! But very absurd—eh?"

"Very." Miss Ponsonby, with a fatigued air and

impatient gesture, shuts up her fan and frowns slightly. "How uninteresting you can be at times!" she says. "If, as a boy, you were as dull in your *têtes-à-tête* as you now are, no wonder I treated you with scorn!"

"Well, but that's just it, you see; I don't think you *did* scorn me," says Mr. Vyner, mildly.

At this moment, through the open doorway that leads into the dancing-room, one can see Sir Chicksy Chaucer perambulating aimlessly about, as though in search of some "lost chord."

"I don't think I ever saw Chaucer in evening clothes before," remarks Vyner, thoughtfully, seeing she will take no notice of his last speech. "How exceedingly—er—uncomfortable he looks! *They* shine, but he doesn't; they are new, I suppose,"

"And he— isn't? You pay him a very great compliment; yet six months should make one quite a dear old friend down here, when one is a baronet, unmarried, and with unlimited means."

"You see he has kept himself so exceedingly dark for those six months," remonstrates Mr. Vyner. "We have scarcely been allowed to see him; now that he has condescended to emerge into the fuller glare—and in his best clothes too—we all bow down before him and acknowledge the effect—maddening!"

"I wonder why you so dislike him?" says Miss Ponsonby, with a curious smile.

"Far be it from me to dislike such a bright and shining light as he promises—*his guardian*—to be," says Mr. Vyner, genially. "His name alone should pull him through—it is a miracle of art. Is there its rival, I wonder? Shakespeare has weakly hinted that there is nothing in a name; but he had never heard Sir

Chicksy's; surely there is much in *it*! Some names we are told 'mock destruction; they survive the doom of all creation.' Of such is your friend's; indeed, I think, if the poet said it 'licked all creation,' he would have been even nearer the mark."

"'Much wit hath commonly much froth, and 'tis hard to jest and not jeer too,'" quotes Audrey, demurely. "And even Sir Chicksy has his uses. See now what a fund of amusement he is to you! How could you exist without such an one upon whom to strike the brilliant matches of pure genius that emanate from you so frequently?"

"You cover me with confusion," says Mr. Vyner; but he does not look confused. "I should not dare to find amusement in a Chaucer! And besides, you know, I honestly regard Sir Chicksy as a very nice, ladylike young man."

"I know at least you have always a pretty tongue!" returns Miss Ponsonby, with a pale smile and an angry flash from her beautiful eyes.

"I wonder what he is looking for?" says Vyner, presently, as Sir Chicksy again crosses the doorway, apparently in high search for something. "Is it for you?"

"Very likely."

"I think he will go mad if left much longer in the dark as to your whereabouts. Are you without mercy? Did you note the expression on his face as he passed just now?"

"*Did* he pass just now?"

"Well, you could hardly call it a passing—it was a flight."

"He will the sooner get to where he is going, then. And why should he go mad?"

"Too much learning! You know what a brain he has. Won't you let him see where you are, and so ease the strain a little?"

"If you want to go—go!" says Miss Ponsonby, abruptly. "As for me, I shall do very well here. That Sir Chicksy should be looking for me does not concern me."

"Your cruelty is barbaric."

"Is it a necessity to you to make silly speeches?" asks the girl, with such profound contempt as wakens some faint amusement in the breast of her companion. "I am not cruel. I simply make it a rule to be happy when possible, at all costs to others."

There is something reckless and defiant in her tone as she turns her eyes to his.

"A very sensible sentiment!" returns he, blandly; yet there is a note in his voice hardly to be desired; it touches her.

"*Why* should I consider others?" she asks, sharply, noting and resenting it. "Do they consider me? Do the silly fools round here who call themselves 'society' regard me with even scanty favour? They turn aside from me because they have the money that I lack, and I the pedigree that they lack. They can't forgive me that last."

"I think you might be content with it."

"As long as I know poverty, I shall never know content," returns she, in a low voice. "But still that is not it; it is their settled dislike to me, the drawing away of their skirts, as it were, that angers me. They

shake their heads and revile me, only because I have a lover or two more than *their* girls, and because—because—well”—with a frown—“because once or twice a recreant knight has deserted their ranks for mine! Do you know what that yellow-haired girl of Mrs. Drummond’s called me the other day? ‘The recruiting sergeant,’ and all because of Mr. Allonby!” She pales visibly, and tears of passionate mortification rise to her large eyes. “I never spoke to that man twice,” she says, “so it wasn’t my fault; and whether or no, he wasn’t good enough; but I suppose her hair was too much for him! They accuse me of making their lovers false. Pah!” cries she, with a shrug and a bitter wild little laugh. “I daresay I am not good for much myself; but I’m good for that, any way!”

“A proud boast!” says Vyner, carelessly.

“Ah! I have no doubt you side with them,” she says, biting her lips. “One goes with the stream because it is least trouble; and I don’t know why I talk to you like this, unless it is that I must say it to somebody.”

“Thank you,” says Vyner.

“They dare to be uncivil to me because Dad takes pupils. I detest that sort of person.”

“If so, I wonder that you care so much what ‘that sort of person’ may or may not say of you.”

“That would be the correct feeling, of course; but I have no correct feelings, I think; at all events, I do care. Oh, to be rich for once—enormously so, I mean, to see them all cringe and fawn to me as they do to others, and then spurn them!”

“To be rich—if that is your highest ambition—is surely within your reach. Remember”—airily—“your face. That is a fortune in itself.”

"A poor one!"

"A rare one."

"I would gladly exchange it for a better," she says, discontentedly. "It brings me in but poor returns."

"Utilize it, then!" says Vyner, turning to her with cold deliberation, and gazing straight into the beautiful, dissatisfied face beside him. "If, as you say, money is your idol, gain it at all hazards. Compel your face to do you service."

"But how?" asks she half frowning; her tone is defiant, and, as though daring him to answer her question, she lifts her eyes resolutely to his.

"Try Sir Chicksy," replies he, slowly, with an involuntary curl of his lip.

Across the girl's face passes an expression that would have startled him had he seen it. But, as the insult passes his lips, he withdraws his gaze, and is now looking steadily at the door beyond. Her lids have half closed, her colour has faded to an ashen grey, there is something that is almost murderous within the shadow that has fallen on her great gleaming eyes.

Sir Chicksy, his boyish, foolish face flushed with anxiety, at this instant comes towards her with a fatuous smile.

"I—I've been all over the place looking for you," he says; "and now"—growing melancholy—"our waltz is almost over."

"You shall have another one to make up for it," returns she, with such unwonted gentleness that the silly lad's heart beats heavily against his breast. "And the next time I must tell you where to find me, so

that there need be no disappointment for either of us."

She smiles, lays her hand upon his arm, and moves away without a backward glance. When she is gone, Vyner rises too, and stretches his arms over his head lazily.

"Well, I was a beast," he says, emphatically; "but—she deserved it!"

The final bars of the last waltz have died away into a sobbing silence. The greater charms of cool conservatories and empty corridors have weeded out the ballroom. So considerably, that now one can see without trouble who is and who is not present.

There are a few lanky young men; a few apparently starved; a few sweetly sad—all these droop a little, and have decaying lilies in their button-holes, and are evidently breathing a purer, more "culchawed" ether than those around them. If so, they must have evolved it from their inner consciousness, as every place, except the garden, is insufferably warm. There are too, mixed up with these, a great many Philistines, unpardonably healthy, and lost in a misty ignorance of the sublime and the beautiful, yet looking very presentable withal.

One can see a few pretty women; a great many plain: one or two whose skins are as olive-green as their gowns, and a few whose garb is rather too much *à la Eden* to be glanced at openly.

Dick Bouverie, moving here and there among the crowd, but chiefly on the staircases and in the halls, for reasons best known to himself, at last catches sight of a little fragile figure that sets his heart beating, standing in a distant corner talking to Bruno.

It is Dolores! For a long time he has sought her, and now, all at once, she is there, standing out from all the others, a thing apart, as it seems to him, smiling, radiant—

“Her face more fair
Than sudden-singing April in soft lands.”

She is clad in a creamy Indian silk, soft and clinging, with no sleeves to hide her perfect arms, and great high puffings on her shoulders. So clear is her pure skin that scarce one may say where the gown ends and her fair self begins. Every word and gesture is rounded with soft grace, each glance is full of infinite variety.

She is talking gaily to Bruno, with parted lips and shining, happy eyes uplifted to his. Then, in a moment, she sees Dick, and she wavers in her speech to Bruno, and the glad eyes send to the elder brother a smile of quick welcome.

Battling his way to her through the crowd of matrons, men, and virgins that separates them, Dick comes up to her presently, breathless, but victorious.

“Why, when did you come?” he asks, eagerly. “How late you are!”

He has quite forgotten to say, “How d’ye do, Miss Lorne?” or anything of that sort.

“It is quite a long time now since we came, isn’t it?” says Dolores, appealing to Bruno. “Half an hour at least! Late? Oh, yes; we were late. Auntie and I always are, I think.”

“How could I have missed you all this time?” says Dick, almost indignantly. “I have been searching for you up hill and down dale for an hour or

more—it seems like a *week* or more, if the truth be told.”

She glances at him quickly, and a little odd expression crosses her face. She opens her lips impulsively, as if to say something, and then repents herself apparently of her intention, because she closes them again without saying anything. But she breaks instead into a faint, low, irrepressible laugh.

“What is it?” asks Dick, who cannot take his eyes off her face, and has therefore marked her hesitation.

“Nothing,” returns she, demurely.

“Miss Lorne wants to tell you,” says Bruno, mildly, “that to call a search for her *up-hill* work is rude.”

“Oh, *no*—no, indeed!” contradicts Miss Lorne, shocked, flushing warmly to the very roots of her short, sunny hair; “that was not it at all! It was only—I merely wanted to say—that——”

She grows hopelessly confused, and her eyes seek the ground.

“What?” asks Dick again, gently.

“Never mind. Ask me some other time,” murmurs she, with an almost childish appeal to him not to press the subject.

“Well,” he says, quickly, “I hope your card is not full yet, though I am so late in finding you. I dare say”—laughing—“if I had not sought you so diligently, I should have found you long ago. What dance may I have?”

He has taken her programme from her.

“Not this,” she says. “I am engaged to your brother for this; but the next, if you will.”

“And the ninth and the fifteenth?”—anxiously.

She looks undecided.

"Oh, you *will!*"—pathetically. "They are the only dances vacant. And remember what ill luck I had in not being able to plead my cause with you at first!"

His manner is growing positively servile.

"Don't cry, Dick," entreats Bruno, whereupon they all laugh a little.

"Miss Lorne, if you are going to be unkind to me in this matter, you will have much to answer for," says Dick, persistently. "You would not knowingly consign me to an early grave, would you?"

"Don't mind him, Miss Lorne," says Bruno. "He is quite too tough for that sort of thing. You take my word for it that the grave won't see him for years to come. If you put faith in Dick's promises to die, you'll be disappointed."

"Alas, Mr. Bouverie, that your word should be so unreliable!" says she, mischievously. "You do protest too much, it seemeth me. Fewer words and truer would be better. Have you forgotten 'In muchë speechë sinnë wanteth not'?"

"Well, punish me if you will," says Bouverie; "though I deny my guilt. But understand, at all events, that if you refuse me those two dances you leave me with nothing to do all night. Think then of the mischief my idle hands are sure to commit."

"Nothing to do? Go and dance with all the others."

"There are no others."

"No woman in the room but me?"

"Not one!"

"Oh, Mr. Bouverie! It was true, then, what your brother hinted about—about your veracity?"

"I maintain," says Bouverie, stoutly, but in a low

tone, "that for me there is no woman in these rooms to-night save and except yourself."

A little smile gathers about her lips. She casts a swift glance at him and then looks down. Bruno is talking in an interested fashion to some one near them, so that virtually they are alone.

"You shall have your dances," she murmurs, softly, with an adorable blush.

"To thank you is impossible!" says Bouverie.

"Now, Dick, do go away!" exclaims Bruno, returning to his charge. "I never saw such a fellow to talk as you are, and Miss Lorne and I want to finish our waltz and our conversation, though we have almost forgotten what it was about now. Is my partner the only one in the room that will satisfy you?"

"It seems so," says Dick, with a quick glance at Dolores; then he bows slightly, and moves away with a half-formed intention of bribing the musicians to cut short the waltz now playing.

"What a beautiful old house this seems to be!" says Dolores, when he has gone, gazing round her. "Is that the picture-gallery down there?"

"Yes. Would you like to see it by lamplight? It is rather worth looking at when lit as it is at present."

They go slowly towards it, guided by the clear light that streams from its many lamps within, and makes quite a little pathway of yellow glare all along the shining oaken floor.

"We've been here, you know, for centuries," says Bruno, as they move leisurely down the almost deserted gallery—"that is, not exactly Dick or me, you know, but our people; and there is really nothing in the way of rascality we haven't done. We are old enough and

disreputable enough for anything. There—that cavalier over there with the villanous squint was hanged for piracy on the high seas; and the one beside him was beheaded for murder in some forgotten reign; and the little innocent simpering thing just behind you poisoned her own husband because she wanted to marry some other woman's husband. We have been assassins and swindlers for a sufficient length of time to enable us now to call ourselves eminently respectable.”

“I don't think we have any shameful story in our family,” says Dolores, pondering regretfully.

“Then, take my word for it, you are not half so worthy of regard as we are,” says Bruno, laughing. “Look at that old colonel over there. Isn't he like Dick? He is his great-grand-uncle, I think, or something of that sort.”

“He is like him, certainly.”

“Dick's a good sort, isn't he?” says Bruno, suddenly, turning to look at her.

“A very good sort, I should say,” she replies, smiling.

“You should not force Miss Lorne's hand,” murmurs Dick's voice behind them.

He looks down at Dolores with an amused glance.

“*Do* listeners hear bad of themselves? I don't believe it,” he says. “This is our dance, Miss Lorne, I am glad to know.”

“So soon!” exclaims Bruno. “Well, that was the shortest waltz I ever heard them play!”

“It really was, I think,” returns Bouverie, with an innocently thoughtful air.

Then Dolores lays her hand upon his arm, and goes down the handsome gallery and into the ball-

room with him. As she does so, Sir George Bouverie, who has dragged himself away from his books to do the civil to his cousin the duchess, exclaims excitedly—

“There now—who is that with Dick—eh, eh? Who is it—eh?”

“A most sweet face indeed!” says the duchess, earnestly.

“That is Miss Lorne—the latest acquisition to our society here,” answers Lady Bouverie, quite pleasantly for her.

“A very pretty one,” puts in her Grace.

“Because so fresh—a year will spoil her,” declares Lady Bouverie, in her insolent fashion. “Meantime, I admit she is charming. You remember old Mr. Maturin, of Greylands? She is his grand-niece, and an heiress.”

“Is it much?” asks the duchess.

“She will inherit Greylands, we hear, and a considerable property in the North, and all her aunt, Miss Maturin’s money, which amounts to a good sum.”

“A desirable wife for some one,” says her Grace, smiling; “and what a face and figure for an Ophelia or a——” she pauses, as though lost in thought.

“I hope she will suit Richard,” says Lady Bouverie, in her cold, measured tones. “He seems very attentive to her. It is the one sensible move I have ever known him make. Her fortune would be of use to him.”

“He will certainly be open to congratulation if he gains her,” says the duchess, who was a handsome woman in her time, and has still a weakness for beauty.

“So will she, if she gains *him*,” returns Lady

Bouverie, with some *hauteur*, to whom even a duchess—in her own opinion—is not a superior. But her Grace, lost in abstruse calculations about a projected theatrical entertainment to be given at the castle to propitiate her engaged girl, does not hear her. Here, in this benighted village, where hope seems hopeless, she has seen two faces full of life and happy possibilities; and, even as she thinks this, she sees a third.

“Who is that pretty creature over there with—er—yes, it is your younger son?” she inquires, eagerly—“a small woman in a queer gown, but with a face full of life, vigour——”

“That is Mrs. Wemyss,” says Lady Bouverie, disapprobation in her tone. “She is a widow, though not ‘one indeed’—a very frivolous person, and much wanting in respect for her elders. ‘Fast’ is, I think, the obnoxious modern word that would best describe her.”

“A very speaking face. What an excellent Constantia Neville she would make!” says the duchess, dreamily. “Is she—er—anybody? Nowadays education and dress so unite the classes that really one doesn’t know to whom one is speaking, and one woman looks quite as well as another. Though, after all, why should it not be so?” winds up her Grace, who is a large, soft, liberal-minded fraction of humanity.

“She married the Honourable George Wemyss, and her father was Lord Brandrum,” explains Lady Bouverie, tersely.

“Bless me! Is that poor Michael Brandrum’s daughter?” says the duchess, for once forgetting stage effects. “I should have known the eyes. What a Lady Teazle she could be! You must present her to me—

and your niece, and that pretty child, Miss Lorne, as well. By-the-bye, your son seems interested in Mrs. Wemyss."

"I think your Grace is at fault there," says Lady Bouverie, coldly.

CHAPTER V.

“Night falls like fire: the heavy lights run low,
And as they drop——”

SWINBURNE.

“LOOK at those lamps in the garden beyond; how lovely they are! See!”—leaning eagerly forward—“there are people walking up and down! Oh, why shouldn’t we go there too?”

Their waltz has come to an end; and they—Dolores and Bouverie—are standing on the balcony from which the distant, scented, lighted gardens can be seen.

“Why not, indeed?” says Dick. “But first I must get something to wrap round you”—looking vaguely about him east and west.

“No, no; I hate being muffled up, and the night is so warm that I can want nothing.”

“Still, even pretence is necessary, as I promised your aunt most faithfully to take great care of you. And see—some providence has supplied me with the means! Let me cover your neck with this.” “This” is a white silken Indian shawl with long trailing fringes, lying on a couch hard by.

“*Che sarà, sarà,*” says Dolores, bending her neck to the yoke.

“Now you are like a naiad, a river-nymph,” says Bouverie, gazing at her with tender admiration when

he has wound the shawl round her little form, "and those fringes—they are the dropping water."

"What a fanciful thought!" returns she, with dainty scorn, though in truth she is right well pleased with his compliment. "And the owner of this shawl"—doubtfully—"what shall be said to her?"

"To avoid the saying of anything, let us make our escape while it is yet possible," says Bouverie, taking her hand and leading her towards the steps that will bring her to the perfumed gardens.

As they go down these steps, some old thought occurs to him.

"Why is your aunt so careful of you?" he asks, slowly.

"Because my mother was delicate," says the girl, pausing and looking at him with regretful eyes. "She died very young, you see. But"—the regret vanishing, and a saucy smile taking its place—"I think the principal reason is that auntie would be quite miserable unless she was making a fuss about me." She pauses here, plucks a little bit of ivy from the wall, and then says shyly but anxiously, "You *like* auntie?"

"I could hardly say how much," returns the young man, with such simple heartiness as convinces her of his truth. There is an increased sweetness in her face as she turns it to him.

"I am glad of that," she says, "because"—naïvely—"I want to like you, and I could not if you and Lallie were not friends." "Lallie" is her pet name for Miss Maturin.

"Well, now you may like me as much as ever you will with a pure heart," says Bouverie, laughing.

As he says this, it occurs to him that it is a very

pure heart indeed that is looking at him out of those lovely eyes—

“Eyes of deep soft lucent hue,
Eyes too expressive to be blue,
Too lovely to be grey.”

And yet they *are* grey too, but dark and tender and loving.

They have descended the steps, have passed the ivied wall of the house, and have now entered the garden's enchanted grounds, where “low and long the shadows creep” over great patches of silvery moonshine to lose themselves in quaint small beds filled full with lily flowers a-row.

Here and there, from arbours and deep dusky clumps of evergreens, shine out the coloured lamps; above them, pale with scorn of their poverty, the lamps of heaven are gleaming clear and calm; a mild wind stirs the air and rouses the scent of the roses. There, glimmers a satin robe; here, some filmy lace makes the soft darkness felt; and now, a ripple of merry laughter breaks from some unknown corner.

“The moon came down the shining stair
Of clouds that fleck the summer sky.
She kissed thee, saying, ‘Child, be fair,
And madden men's hearts, even as I.
Thou shalt love all things strange and sweet.’”

Looking at the pale slender little maiden walking beside him, these words involuntarily come to Bouverie's mind. But silence, born of the beauty of the scene around, has fallen upon them both, and, mute as the sleeping nature upon which they gaze, they go through the mists of night. Then some little movement, some

catching of her gown by an amorous rose-bush, kills their silence; and, as though not an instant has flown since his last speech, he says, slowly—

“Do *you* like *me*?”

“You know it,” replies she, very kindly, and without hesitation or confusion of any kind. “See here!”—stopping to lay her fingers lightly on his arm. “I will tell you something. I like you better than anybody I have met since I came here.”

A sudden and eager desire to kiss the dainty fingers of this dainty speaker is at this moment conscientiously and valorously overcome by Bouverie.

“What! Better than Bruno?” he asks, with an affectation of lightness, but with real concern.

“Pouf—yes,” exclaims she, with a faintly foreign gesture and the prettiest shrug of her shoulders.

“Yet Bruno is more calculated to please a little light-hearted girl like you than I am—a dull fellow like me.”

“*Are* you dull?” asks Dolores, raising her dark brows.

“Base flatterer!” says Bouverie, with a sudden pleased laugh. “Yes, I am very dull, as you will in time discover.”

“Ah, well then,” with a quaint sweet glance, “I know now that dull people are congenial to me! Yet I do not know”—archly—“that your last little speech altogether pleases me. ‘Birds of a feather,’ say they, ‘flock together.’ If your company suits me, that proves me dull too; your suggestion is not over-polite; is it?”

“There is another proverb,” says he, “about ‘extremes meeting;’ that should explain my seeming rudeness; and, indeed, to be even in thought rude to

you would require more courage than I possess. Who else in this benighted spot has found favour in your sight? You see, I am only too glad to believe your statement that I have at least a small place there."

"Many people; but your cousin Audrey, of all my women acquaintances, I like her best."

"You will find yourself alone in that fancy, I think," says Dick, who does not get on with Miss Ponsonby.

"No; auntie likes her too, and—and there are others."

"Sir Chicksy, for example," with an irrepressible laugh that is suggestive of mockery.

"He is very kind-hearted," says Dolores, with a touch of reproof.

"I daresay. I wonder if Audrey means marrying him?"

"Oh, no, no!" hastily.

"Why that emphatic 'No?' She might do worse."

"She might do so much better. And why marry him, if she does not love him?"

"To marry without love—is that a crime?"

"I think so."

"It is committed daily, then, by very estimable people."

"Poor things!" says Miss Lorne, with a gentle sigh. She seems so in earnest in this speech, to feel so deeply the importance of her subject, that Bouverie's eyes seek hers with a swift and rather distasteful curiosity.

"What do you know of love?" he asks, with subdued sharpness.

"Why, nothing," returns she, slowly.

They have passed over the rustic bridge now, and gone beyond the sound of the laughter and the light fall of footsteps; there is a strange seductive calm on everything, broken only by the rapid rush of the stream as it hurries ever onward.

It is the "mid-hour of night, when stars are weeping," and the moon's richest rays are cast upon the earth; there is no chill, no damp in all the air, no touch of death in the glad luxuriance of the sleeping flowers. On such a night as this Eros lies broad awake with bended bow, and arrow poised for flight.

The bridge is passed, and under the dark myrtles they saunter slowly by grinning fauns and leering satyrs, and wood-nymphs slim and coy. Here Venus on a marble pedestal makes great ado to hide her gleaming limbs with her long yellow hair from the too-eager gaze of an adoring Apollo; a would-be dissolute Apollo, now for once in spite of him made decent, being clothed about with the long tendrils of the modest ivy.

And now they have come to another little stream that no bridge spans, a tumbling merry baby of a river that divides them from a fairy-like spot that, because unattainable, seems to them even more desirable than those through which they have been wandering.

"I wish we could get across," says Dolores, hesitating on the high bank at this side to look longingly over to where the great amber roses are nodding drowsily beneath Diana's mystic rays.

"There is a walk that will take us round to the other side, but it is a good deal higher up," says Bouverie; "and it isn't worth while our trying to find it when one spring would land us where we would

be. If you will give me your hand I think it can be done."

She has gathered up the tail of her white gown and thrown it over a bare soft arm that is even whiter; her other arm she stretches out to Bouverie.

"But what if I were to jump short?" she says, nervously, glancing downwards somewhat fearfully at the swift stream dancing so blithely in the moonlight, and chanting gaily as it flies over its pebbles and past its flowery weeds. "I should be a veritable naiad then indeed," with an arch glance at him from under her long lashes. "But, in spite of the poetry contained in that thought, I think I should prefer to be dry."

"Trust yourself to me," says Bouverie, assuringly.

The words, as he says them, are simple ones and really mean nothing; but, when they are said, it seems as though an echo of them comes back to him fraught with deepest intent. In the strange future that lies before her, to whom will she trust herself? And if, perchance, to some one like him—like him!—how will he discharge his trust? And if to another—— His fingers close with sudden half-angry vehemence over hers.

"Come!" he says, and to himself his voice sounds harsh.

She leans towards him, still with her eyes upon the mad little river beneath.

"Oh, it is farther than I thought!" she says, drawing back a little.

Lightly, but with a certain determination, he slips his arm round her waist and inclines her towards the stream.

"Now spring!" he says.

And then, in another moment, she finds herself standing beside him on the opposite bank, untouched by spray or running water.

"Well, you see, you *did* trust yourself to me!" he is saying, a certain irrepressible gaiety in his tone. He is indeed feeling unaccountably, foolishly glad that, at the last moment, she had not shrunk from him.

"So I did. And, after all, there was no cause for fear!" returns she, smiling.

Her hand is still lying within his, clasped firmly. She has perhaps forgotten to withdraw it, and he perhaps is in no hurry to release it. As she stands thus before him, with uplifted chin and laughing eyes and dainty slender figure framed in by yellow roses, she is looking even more than beautiful.

"Tell me," he says, earnestly, "why you hesitated so long about giving me those two dances when we first met to-night?"

"If I hesitated," she says, looking down, and shyly moving a pebble to and fro with the point of her shoe, "it was not—not that I did not mean to give them."

"Yet you certainly thought twice before granting them. Were they—perhaps—intended for some other man?"

"Oh, no," quickly, "indeed no! You must not think that."

"I did think it. I felt so sure of it for one moment that I was very near accepting your hesitation as a final refusal, and going away heartbroken."

"Oh, well," she says, smiling too, "I am glad you thought better of it! If"—raising her eyes for an instant to his, with a soft glance, adorable, but all too

swift—"if you had taken me at my word, I should have—been——"

"What?" he asks, eagerly.

"Disappointed," she replies, slowly.

"I wish I dared to believe that," says Bouverie.

"You may. Why," with a little soft, embarrassed laugh, "if I must confess it, I had kept them for you! Now you believe?"

"To disbelieve would cost me too much. Though 'fairy gold be all my gain,' still I prefer to think as you would have me do."

"There is little real faith in all that speech," says Miss Lorne, with some slight indignation. Then suddenly, "Do you know how long we have been here? *Hours* it seems to me. Come let us return."

"There is just one thing more," protests he, detaining her. "What was it you would not say to me before Bruno?"

"Before Bruno?"

"Yes. I had been telling you of my long and fruitless search for you, when you—laughed. I asked you why you laughed; but you would not answer me, and only told me to ask you about it some other time. This is 'some other time.'"

"Is it?"

"*Isn't* it?"

"What a cross-examiner you would make!" retorts she, with a slight shrug. "Well, let me think about it. I believe," looking down, "I am not sure, you know, but I suppose"—reluctantly—"I was wondering where the necessity was for your searching for me at all."

"Ah," says Bouverie—something in her tone has bitterly offended him—"I daresay it did seem ludicrous

to you—my anxiety to find you, I mean. It certainly sounds so, as you put it.”

“Now I have made you angry!” exclaims she, with impatient penitence. “And why? Simply because I want a reason for your having given yourself very unnecessary trouble about me.”

“I should think your instinct might have supplied that reason,” replies he, coldly.

“Perhaps I am without instinct, then, because I *don't* know!” declares she, petulantly. “At least, I fail to see why it should not seem strange to me—your wasting an hour or so trying to find me.”

“If one could not see by your eyes that—that certain things were impossible to you, one might,” begins he hastily, and then as hastily checks himself. “Regard my conduct as a folly, then, if you will,” he says, stiffly.

“I am sorry if I have vexed you,” says Dolores, looking at him strangely. “But yet I meant no unkindness—none. And I do not think it is a good thing to lose one’s temper about nothing; do you?”

“But is it about nothing? Do you think I don’t want you to know—to understand?” exclaims he, with some suppressed vehemence. Then he grows suddenly calm again. “If I sought you,” he says, with deliberation, “it was because I desired to be with you—to see, to hear you. That is plain-speaking, at all events, and will prevent your being puzzled by me in future, or regarding my conduct as ‘strange.’ But *why* did you so regard it? Were there,” watching her eagerly, “no others in your life to whom your presence meant what it does to me?”

"A few—perhaps," returns she, with slight hesitation—a hesitation he misconstrues.

"For 'few,' read 'legion,'" he says, brusquely. "Well, and did all their insane devotion wake mirth within your breast?"

"No." She is growing a little nervous now, and the blood is changing rapidly beneath her transparent skin. "Many people have been kind to me," she says, "and I do not think any of them, *except you*, would have called their attentions to me 'insanity.' And, as for you—it was not 'mirth' I felt that you should give yourself trouble on my account, but only surprise."

Then her manner changes altogether. Her nervousness vanishes; she throws up her little stately head with a proud gesture, and turns her eyes full on his.

"To get back to the house, is it necessary I should cross this stream again?" she asks calmly, without a trace of anger or any undue coldness—yet his heart dies within him.

"Not unless you wish it. That path I told you of, before we crossed it, will take you even more quickly to the house."

"That is fortunate. I have too long delayed," she says, quietly, turning away from him.

For a little while they are silent as they go along the gravelled walk; and then, as though unable longer to abstain from expression of his fear, he says, in a low voice full of earnest entreaty—

"Let there be no coldness between us two!"

"Neither now, nor at any other time," she says, softly, turning to him with a sudden friendly smile.

CHAPTER VI.

“Wild mulberries for her mouth to eat,
She’ll get nae mair though it garred her greet.”
SWINBURNE.

“Lo, sweet, if I durst not pray to you,
Then were I dead.”
SWINBURNE.

THE hours are flying on fleet wings. Already the pale early summer morning is showing about the dark hill-tops. The duchess has twice yawned distinctly, but, with an estimable good-nature, has forborne from leaving, lest a general break-up should follow on her departure. Young people, with a view to prevent any elderly attempts at withdrawal, are going about stating eagerly, as a happy fact, that *now indeed* they are beginning to enjoy themselves. Mothers with marriageable daughters are trying heroically not to look sleepy—mothers without them are murmuring of carriages.

“Any hope that I may have another dance with you?” asks Vyner, coming face to face with Miss Ponsonby in a doorway.

“My card is quite full.” She had met his eyes for a moment; but now her own are turned contemptuously aside, and it is certainly the wall beyond she addresses as she says this, not him.

“May I see it?”

“Certainly,”—she lifts the little scented card at—

tached to her fan, and waves it idly to and fro; for an instant her half-closed lids, insolently lowered, are raised to let the dark angry beauty of her eyes be seen — “a pretty programme, is it not?” she says.

“May I see the inside of it?”

“But why? The inside of one card is quite the same as another.”

“Not always. And I am anxious to see what is written in yours.”

“You are anxious, in other words, to see whether I am or am not telling a lie!” returns she, with a soft scornful laugh.

“That is an ugly word! All I want to see is what names are on your card.”

“There is no dance there for you. In that at least you may believe me.”

“I believe you always. What you mean is that you refuse to give me a dance?”

“Is it?” She looks bored, and makes a slight movement, as if to go into the ballroom. Sir Chicksy, who is with her, moves too.

“I suppose you have given my dance away, then,” says Vyner, indifferently, drawing back. “I regret very much you should have seen cause to do so.”

“Did I give you another? I had forgotten it. If so, I regret my seeming rudeness,” returns she, studied dislike in her tone. Then she sweeps away from him in her swaying, graceful, insolent fashion, and is lost in the throng of dancers beyond.

“What an insolent air that girl has!” says Mrs. Drummond, the sugar-merchant’s daughter, who, with her dear friend Mrs. Dovedale beside her, has witnessed Audrey’s dismissal of Vyner.

The speaker is a tall, stout, florid woman with a superabundance of flesh and a toned vulgarity that breaks its bonds occasionally, and asserts itself with a triumphant rush. Her companion, Mrs. Dovedale, is as perfect a contrast to her as she—Mrs. Dovedale—could possibly desire. The rector's wife is a small, fair, childish, innocent-looking little thing, with forget-me-not eyes and a dimpled chin and remarkably thin lips. From those lips, so daintily curved, fall little speeches now and then so wonderfully spiced, so delicately pointed, so cruelly apt, that few care to provoke them. Time has taught her neighbours to treat this pretty little woman with careful respect. Time has also taught them to detest her cordially. Yet, strange to say, there are few people in all Deadmarsh so universally *fêted* as quiet Mrs. Dovedale. Her soft but rather mocking laughter is to be heard everywhere. Her charming blue eyes that know no shrinking are to be met with at any ball and dinner in the country, at the most select *matinées*, and at the very "smallest and earliest" of receptions.

"Yes, insolent," repeats Mrs. Drummond, with vigour, turning to her companion for corroboration. "And how Mr. Vyner detests her! I have frequently noticed his positive aversion. Haven't you, dear?"

"I'm so wretchedly unremarking!" says Mrs. Dovedale, apologetically. "You will *see* that when I tell you I have often believed him rather attentive to her than otherwise."

She does not really believe this; but the knowledge that Mrs. Drummond looks upon Anthony Vyner as a possible suitor for the hand of her daughter Georgina compels her to say it.

"You are indeed wanting in penetration if you could think that," says Mrs. Drummond, with a sour smile; "such an uninteresting girl as she is, and—and so reprehensible in many ways! Why, even her own aunt, dear Lady Bouverie, does not countenance her!"

"I think she is afraid of her," says Mrs. Dovedale, with an irrepressible laugh. "But, of course, one can understand that she is a trial. Such shocking form, as you say—quite inadmissible!"

"I hate a settled coquette!" declares Mrs. Drummond, whose daughter's lover, because of Audrey, had proved faithless. "Artfulness of that sort can be acquired, I suppose, and men—who are all but poor creatures—may be seduced by it; but worth must gain the day in the long run."

"The worst of it is, one is so terribly tired after a long run," says Mrs. Dovedale, in her sweet, innocent, high treble, and with a little childish shake of her head. "But I'm sure I'm not surprised you dislike Audrey—there is, as you say, something about her—that——"

"'Dislike' is a strong word; but," says Mrs. Drummond, virtuously, "I think there can be no harm in saying I rejoice, in that no one of any consequence has taken notice of that girl to-night."

Here the conversation suffers a slight break, because of Audrey's approach. She passes without vouchsafing either of them so much as a glance of recognition, going by them slowly, with the contemptuous air of one who, knowing them near, still purposely declines to acknowledge their presence; she disappears into a windowed recess near, and sinks upon a cushioned lounge.

"Audrey," says Bruno Bouverie, coming up to her, "the duchess has expressed a wish that you should be introduced to her."

Audrey flushes. She is out of humour, and indeed in one of her very worst moods.

"*I* have expressed no wish to be introduced to the duchess," she answered sharply, with a frown. And then she grows suddenly pale again, and stands erect and defiant, though inwardly shocked at her discourtesy, as the curtains part and the duchess herself comes towards her.

"Must I then sue for your friendship?" says her Grace, with a smile.

"I beg your Grace's pardon," says Audrey, slowly, but with a certain *hauteur* that belongs to her, and so becomes her. "Your desire to know me, must, of course, be regarded as an honour, though the desire itself must for ever remain a mystery to me."

"Tut, child!" says the duchess, with an amused glance. "A fair face is ever an introduction in itself, and that you carry about with you, whether you will or no."

"Did you mark that?" says Mrs. Drummond, exultingly. "She cannot be civil even to her Grace. Was there ever a girl with such an ill-regulated mind? I am now doubly rejoiced that I have not sent her an invitation to my ball on the twenty-third. Georgina would not hear of it. She is very sensible, and she really can't bear Miss Ponsonby."

"I am not surprised at that," says Mrs. Dovedale so fervently, yet so artlessly, that her friend, after a swift doubt, fails to accuse her of any *arrière pensée*;

“but no doubt she has some good qualities, poor thing!”

“I greatly doubt it,” says Mrs. Drummond, severely. “If I thought you could believe——”

“Hu-sh! The duchess is talking again,” interrupts little Mrs. Dovedale, in a peculiar tone.

“I have besides a favour to ask of you,” her Grace is saying, in her sweetest manner. “My daughter, Lady Florence, has set her heart on getting up some private theatricals whilst staying down here—just a short play or two. Will you help her? We want to get up a little company from among our neighbours here”—with a friendly smile—“and your face tells me you will be a great acquisition to our forces if you will consent to join us.”

This is the very essence of graciousness; and Mrs. Dovedale, watching her friend closely, can see that her face grows pale as she listens.

“Audrey can act most parts, from a dairymaid to a duchess,” says Bruno, with a little saucy laugh and a glance at her Grace.

“Very good, then; she shall illustrate me,” says her Grace, smiling. At this Audrey lifts her eyes, and a slow, pretty smile widens her lips.

“Oh, no,” she says; “but you shall make me the dairymaid, or anything else that pleases you!”

“I shall promise you a principal part,” says the duchess, kindly. “And there is a little Miss Lorne here to-night, and Mrs. Wemyss, whose father was—a very old friend of mine. We must get them to join us too. And you must all three give me the pleasure of your company at the castle for a week or so, to get things well together.”

"Did you hear that?" demands Mrs. Dovedale, with rather unpleasant vivacity. "She has actually invited that—what was it you called her?—artful—eh?—yes, that *artful* girl, to spend a week at the castle!"

"I heard her," says Mrs. Drummond, who has now grown positively livid.

"What a pity she didn't ask Georgina too!" murmurs Mrs. Dovedale, with suspicious sympathy.

"I have no doubt she would have done so had she been brought beneath her notice," says Mrs. Drummond, with dignity.

"Eh—oh, I don't think Georgina is beneath her notice!" protests Mrs. Dovedale, with generous correction. "Even though she is a duchess, I don't think"—with maddening misapprehension—"you need say that."

"It will be a terrible thing for you, dear, if this slight deafness grows on you," says Mrs. Drummond, tartly, and with ill-suppressed rage. "Georgina is a girl whom the queen might delight to honour. I simply meant that the duchess was unfortunate enough not to see her. Georgina is not a bold girl, like some others I could name; she is not one to push herself forward."

"I don't think it was that," says Mrs. Dovedale, mildly. "Indeed, I know for a fact that the duchess *did* see her; she took great notice of her."

"Did she indeed?" exclaims Mrs. Drummond, eagerly. "Ah, she would, no doubt! There is something striking about my girl."

"She spoke of her. I was standing very near her Grace at the time, and could overhear what she said,"

continues Mrs. Dovedale, with a glance at her friend full of the gentlest encouragement.

"Yes; and what was it you heard, dear?" asks Mrs. Drummond, with a painful but useless effort to appear indifferent.

"She said, 'Who is that big girl over there, with the hopelessly uninteresting face?'" returns the vicar's wife, very sweetly.

The colour flames into the placid cheeks of her companion. She turns venomous eyes upon little Mrs. Dovedale, only to meet the eyes of that small lady calmly bent on her with an expression in them so open, so guileless, so devoid of harmful intention, as to disarm the severest suspicion.

"She could not have meant Georgina!" says Mrs. Drummond, in a stifled tone.

"I think she did, because I heard Lady Bouverie say, in answer, 'That is a person called Miss Drummond.'"

The "person" does it! It sounds even worse than all that has gone before, and more humiliating. Mrs. Drummond grows limp and loses courage, and literally goes down before it. Alas, alas! Will no one ever forget about that sugar?

"A cursory glance such as the duchess cast at Georgina could never tell one much," she says, with a last faint attempt to hold her position.

"Yet just such another cursory glance gained Miss Ponsonby her invitation to the castle," Mrs. Dovedale kindly reminds her, with unremitting sweetness and unremitting cruelty too; "but, as you say, Miss Ponsonby is a bold, forward girl, and you have indeed reason to be glad you have publicly denied her a card

for your ball. You feel no foolish but kind-hearted regrets about it now, dear; do you?"

There is in this last question so large a sympathy in look and tone, bound up with such an under-current of malice, as finally routs Mrs. Drummond. "Curses, not loud but deep" she casts upon her friend, the vicar's poor but well-born wife; and, rising, mutters something of home, and makes haste to put space between them.

"I wonder," says Mrs. Dovedale to herself, a strange smile lighting up her infantile face, "if, in the future, she will find that great joy in trying to patronize a baronet's daughter that, up to the present, has been her chiefest delight. She is tough—very; but I think I scored to-night!"

And now the final break-up has come. The duchess has already gone, the carriages are thinning. Dolores is standing in the hall waiting for hers, whilst Bouverie, with slow care, is wrapping her in her cloak of ruby plush.

"A while since I said you looked like a fairy; I wonder now how I had the courage," says Bouverie, as he struggles manfully with the fastenings. "In that royal colour you look like a queen. *Must* you go? How I hate punctual servants! One moment!" sinking his voice to a lover-like whisper. "May I call to-morrow?"

"But of course! It is our day, you know; and—and I am sure auntie will be very glad to see you."

"That assurance pleases me indeed; but there is another that, if you could give it, would please me infinitely more. Will *you* be glad to see me?"

"I shall indeed!" She says this very softly and

with a shy, sweet little blush. Then—"good-night"—holding out to him her hand.

"Good-night. Good-by."

"Until to-morrow," smiling.

"That means to-day," returns he, quickly, unmistakable happiness on his handsome face. "But a few hours lie between now and our next meeting."

"Ah, true; I had forgotten that."

There is a touch of real pleasure in her tone that sets his heart beating, and brings to his lips words, not more ardent than his thoughts, but expressive of a deeper tenderness than he has dared yet to show.

"A few hours," he repeats, unsteadily, "will bring me to you again. And until then, and after, and *for ever*, I shall hold you—and you only—in my heart."

Then the carriage-door is closed upon her, and her face is hidden, purposely turned from him, as it seems to Bouverie, standing remorsefully upon the stone steps, with the chilly morning air beating upon his uncovered head. What madness had prompted him to say so much? Has he frightened her, has she thought him unpardonably rude? And yet what a small, *small* portion it was, of the passionate feeling that is consuming him! "Oh, the little more, and how much it is!"

Was she angry? Looking down he catches sight of a pale little blossom lying down at his feet. It was hers; she had worn it close to her bosom to-night! it now is his! As though it is some fair messenger of peace from her to him, he lifts it gladly and carries it indoors and up to his own room.

CHAPTER VII.

“What shall be said between us here
Among the downs between the trees?

* * * * *

Who knows what word were best to say
On this sweet day!”

SWINBURNE.

UPON the upper part of the lawn, near the tennis-ground, a good many rugs and pretty garden-chairs are scattered broadcast. Greylands, lying as it does now in the brilliant June sunshine, is at its best, with its waving trees and its glimpse of the cool green sea, its old grey walls and ivied towers.

Dolores, in a huge white hat that makes her look like an overgrown fairy, is moving here and there in pretty restless fashion from one visitor to another, as though last night's fatigue and late hours are all mere hallucinations of the brain. Her restlessness is perhaps a little feverish, her gaiety somewhat strained; but none except those who love her would notice it, and as for the rest, they vote her manner even more than usually charming to-day. The soft dark circles beneath her eyes only render them more rich in pathetic beauty, the two warm touches of carmine on her cheeks but serve to throw out the dazzling fairness of her skin. She is gracious, courteous, sympathetic, as ever, yet always her glance turns to that corner

of the grounds from whence new-comers may be expected.

"She is the very prettiest creature I know," says Mrs. Wemyss, with unaffected admiration, turning to Bruno Bouverie, who is lounging beside her. As a rule, he always *is* lounging beside her. It is a flirtation of such old standing now between these two—quite a year in all—that people have almost forgotten to gossip about it and wonder over their teacups if it will ever come to anything.

Cecily Wemyss is a widow, a very young widow, and a very light-hearted one. Indeed, ever since the death of her husband—of whom, as the dead cannot defend themselves, the least said the better—her spirits have risen to such an abnormal height that it must be uncharitably believed that she was heartily glad to get rid of him. She is small, dark, piquante, a brunette in effect, *pure et simple*—well, perhaps not *very* simple—with laughing eyes and merry lips, and hair that finds subjugation difficult.

"I daresay," says Bruno. "But of whom are you talking?"

"Of Miss Lorne."

"You are right there"—with mild enthusiasm; "she is out and out the prettiest girl I know."

"Is she?"

"The prettiest *girl!*" returns Bruno, with careful emendation.

"Ah!" says Mrs. Wemyss. Then she laughs a little and glances at him from under artfully lowered lids. "That last was clever," she says.

She unfurls an enormous black fan, and waves it to and fro to the great discomfiture of a big bumble-

bee, which, made dizzy by the storm thus raised, falls heavily, sleepily into her lap, and begins explorations there among her laces. There is a tremulous tranquillity in all the air that soothes the senses and renders speechlessness no crime, but rather a necessity. Quivering sunbeams are creeping from flower to flower, the swift stream at the foot of the lawn is making sweetest music as it rushes by its shelving banks, where close to

“The river’s trembling edge
There grow broad flag-flowers, purple pranked with white.”

“Still thinking of the most charming being you know?” murmurs Mrs. Wemyss at last, closing her fan with a little snap, and raising two great lustrous eyes to his.

“Yes,” says Bruno.

“She should be flattered. Five, six—nay, seven minutes—and all spent on her.”

“I have spent more time than that on her without awakening any gratitude within her breast.”

“It is your modesty that makes you say that. How can you know what thoughts are stirring in her breast?”

“I don’t believe any thoughts are stirring there; it is too frozen to admit of movement.”

“Oh, how you malign her!”

“Do I? You should know best.”

“Then I will prophesy to you that your wooing—if you put sufficient heart into it—will prosper.”

“If you can assure me of that, it is the best news I have heard for many a day; yet I have my doubts.”

"A true lover always doubts. But why should you believe her ungrateful?"

"She looks so."

"I don't agree with you. I think she looks only happy," says Mrs. Wemyss, with one swift glance at Dolores, who is laughing merrily.

"That is no good sign."

"What!" — archly. "Would you have your love always on the very verge of despair? That is so like a man! See now how much prettier she looks when laughing."

"She is not laughing."

"How can you say that? What! Has Cupid indeed made you blind?"

"I cannot see that she is laughing."

"Why, where are your eyes?"

"On you," says Bruno.

"Oh, then, of course you can't see her!"

"I can, indeed."

"Who?"

"We were talking of my love, I think, weren't we?" says he, with an assumption of meekness, but with the most glaring audacity. Whereupon they both laugh.

"May the gods grant you sense!" says Mrs. Wemyss, with a little scornful tilting of her chin.

"And you a kinder mind. Amen!" returns he.

"Already it is *too* kind. It is well I am not of a jealous disposition."

"I would you were a trifle more so; it would be-token deeper feeling."

"Out and out the prettiest thing you knew!" — reproachfully.

"If you believed that nonsensical speech, it didn't seem to *affect* you much"—still more reproachfully. "You would have made me over to her with a light heart, I do believe. Perhaps it would have been an easy way of getting rid of me."

"Whose kingdom is so large that she would seek to rid herself of her best possession?" asks she, in a low tone and with an adorable glance.

A little shout from the triumphant side of the tennis-court breaks upon their left. Then sides are changed, and the game begins again, the abrupt and uncertain sound of the balls falling pleasantly upon the monotonous noises of Nature.

"You two always seem to me to be the happiest people in the world," says Dolores, coming up to them presently and sinking into a seat near Mrs. Wemyss.

"I say, Bruno, where is Dick?" asks Vyner, who has also strolled up to them more in the wake of Audrey Ponsonby than actually with her.

"I can't think," answers Bruno. "Perhaps he didn't mean coming."

"He did," says Audrey, who is looking really beautiful, but listless and cold as usual.

"He told you so, perhaps?" asks Vyner, who seems anxious in a lazy sort of way to bridge over the unpleasantness of last night.

"No," returns Miss Ponsonby, uncompromisingly, gazing not at him, but at something that isn't in the "far, far distance."

"The information is vague, but full of interest," remarks Mr. Vyner, unabashed. "It gives us every hope that he has been foully murdered. Miss Pon-

sonby, the last person who saw him alive, at precisely thirty-five minutes and twenty-one seconds after three A.M., declares on oath he was then bent on being here early to-day. Has any one telegraphed to Scotland Yard?"

"I shouldn't wonder if our beloved mother had sent him all the way to Horton to make some modest purchase," says Bruno. "It would be just like her, considering the day is eighty in the shade."

"Let us be thankful, at all events," murmurs Mr. Vyner, piously, "that it wasn't to make some *immodest* purchase. One should always, my dear Bruno, be grateful for small mercies. Miss Ponsonby, I can see, agrees with me."

No response from Miss Ponsonby, not even a quiver of the eyelids to show she had heard so much as the mention of her name.

"A warm day, indeed, to go as far as Horton!" says Dolores, lightly.

Yet her face had changed at the mention of Bouverie's name. Had he kept purposely away? Had he repented him of those few hurried, honeyed words last night?

"Here comes Mrs. Dovedale," says Cecily Wemyss, suddenly, "and with her her *fidus Achates*, of course, in all her war-paint. How I detest that Mrs. Drummond and her Georgie! I never know which is the more objectionable of the two."

"Or the three," says Bruno. "Mrs. Dovedale is to me as objectionable as the others. Her tongue is sharper than the serpent's tooth. See now how tenderly she smiles upon Miss Maturin. I daresay

she has taken her completely in, and made her believe her 'altogether such an one as herself.' "

"That would be a simple task," says Dolores, with a fond glance at Miss Maturin, who is smiling her kindest at the vicar's wife. "Auntie is always sure that every one she meets thinks just as she does."

Here the vicar's wife leaves Miss Maturin and goes trippingly across the lawn to some one for whom she has a barbed arrow in quiver. She is, therefore, looking quite her sweetest, and has a simple little pompadour gown on her, and a baby hat that suits her down to the ground.

"How very picturesque and idyllic!" says Vyner, softly.

"Dear little saint! I wonder what venom lies beneath that simper?" suggests Mrs. Wemyss.

"I would not be Mrs. Harcourt"—the woman now addressed by Mrs. Dovedale—"at this moment for a good round crown," declares Bruno, which certainly is not much of a sum, but is evidently meant to represent a fabulous amount, the very roundness of it being a guarantee of its immensity.

"She's a nightmare," says Vyner; "but still, I think, can hardly hold comparison with her patron in that respect. Oh! for that Mrs. Drummond, and, oh! for her Georgie! Eh—ah! *How* d'ye do, Mrs. Drummond? So glad to see you! Your daughter here to-day?"

"Yes, over there," says the matron, blandly. "I'm sure she would be glad if you would see her through a game of tennis. She plays well—excellently well, I

may say, but she is *so* nervous! Quite a child in many ways, I assure you."

"She looks it," murmurs Vyner, tenderly.

"By Jove, here's Chicksy!" exclaims Bruno, when Mrs. Drummond has carried herself off. "Better late than never! I wonder who makes his clothes? They are the tightest fit I ever saw!"

"He dresses himself very well, I think," says Mrs. Wemyss, who is good-natured.

"On the principle that 'fine feathers make fine birds.' Well, he is wise!" says Bruno.

"Now I wonder why on earth he wears that eye-glass?" remarks Mr. Vyner, plaintively. "The very mental anxiety connected with the fixing of it, to say nothing of the injury to his sight, must be terribly wearing to his constitution!"

"Oh, don't fret about him!" says Bruno, with tender anxiety. "I assure you it does him no harm; he always takes it out when he wants to see."

"He is very clever, is he not?" asks Dolores, in perfect good faith. "He is very well read, I mean, and likely to take honours and that?"

At first there is an astonished silence, and then every one laughs involuntarily, forgetful of manners and all the rest of it. Even Audrey, after a swift, curious glance at Dolores, gives way to low but unrestrained mirth.

"There is no knowing what he isn't going to take," says Mr. Vyner, with a swift glance at Audrey; "but, in accordance with his appearance, which is charmingly youthful, I should say measles first, after that mumps, and so on. We should be proud to have

such an erudite youth in our midst. Do you feel proud, Mrs. Wemyss?"

"I'm too meek a woman for that," laughs Mrs. Wemyss. "Pride and I parted company many-a-day ago, and I have felt much more comfortable ever since." As she says this, she smiles kindly at Audrey, who is moodily trifling with a large moss-rose. "And, after all, it is quite a shame of us to laugh at Sir Chicksy, because he has more good points than most of us."

"He has, indeed," says Bruno. "If you mean his elbows and knees, I never saw a man in all my life so oppressed with them. Why, they are all over him!"

"Mrs. Wemyss is right," says Vyner, with suspicious gravity. "Let us cease from evil speaking. Sir Chicksy is not to be despised. He wears good clothes, has money, a title, and no relations; he is considered clever by one very charming young lady, and is the sworn admirer of another—I mention no names, so no actions can be taken—and is, on the whole, a very nice girlish boy. I myself regard him with the very keenest veneration! Have I summed up all those good points you mentioned, Mrs. Wemyss?"

"You laugh! But do you know he reads poetry very well indeed?" says Dolores, who is a tender little soul, with whom the absent are always right. "He came up here the other day and read 'Locksley Hall' for auntie and me, and we were quite pleased."

The two men looked at her, and perhaps at the same moment the same thought runs through both their minds. At all events, it is a very kindly glance she gets from each.

"He is fortunate at least in having so sweet a

champion," says Vyner, gently, with a little graceful bend of his head.

"He isn't a bad old chap when all is told," acknowledges Bruno, with a sudden and most unexpected clemency.

"Here come the Montgomerys!" cries Mrs. Wemyss, suddenly. "I wonder if there is any one in the county who *isn't* here? I expect"—turning with a genial smile to Dolores—"that this is going to be the one popular house in the neighbourhood. Mine used to be the general rendezvous, at least"—with a glance at Bruno—"boys found it a useful place in which to air their griefs and joys. But now I give in to your aunt—I cede popularity—*all* to her. I may as well before I *must*. Submission is more honourable than defeat."

"What a cowardly sentiment!" laughs Miss Maturin, who has strolled up to them, her heavier duties being at an end. She has indeed longed secretly at heart to be with them for an hour or more, silly youth being always dearer to her than sober age. She lays her hand now on Audrey's shoulder, who is nearest to her. "I hope you will all come here just as often as ever you like," she says, kindly, with a comprehensive glance. "Not"—laughing—"that I have any right to invite you. There"—indicating Dolores with a slight wave of her hand—"stands the little mistress of Greylands."

"Yes, *I* am the real *châtelaine*. This is but my slave and vassal," retorts Dolores, saucily, but with the proudest, fondest smile at Miss Maturin. Slipping her hand through her arm, she presses close to her in a little confiding tender fashion.

Here the conversation is interrupted by the approach of servants armed with trays and small round tables, and a happy confusion of tea, curaçoa, strawberries and cream, cakes, and brandy and soda.

"Nothing like soda after being up all night," says Bruno, cheerfully.

"*Plain*," supplements Mr. Vyner, severely.

"I don't think I ever saw so many ugly women together as I saw last night," says Audrey, suddenly, without any preface. "I hate unpresentable people!"

"I thought all the women shockingly *fagotées*, certainly," acquiesces Mrs. Wemyss, with a shrug. "But what will you? Beauty is a rare weed, and the art of dressing up to one's style almost unknown."

"I liked that queer-coloured gown on the duchess," says Dolores. "It was old-fashioned, but somehow it suited her. It was a sort of kindness to her complexion, her choosing that colour."

"What a speech from you!" exclaims Vyner, opening his eyes. "It only shows that the very sweetest of us can sometimes be severe."

"Was that severe?" asks Dolores, colouring. "I didn't mean it. But, indeed, it occurred to me that—that in anything but that shade she might not look her—her *best*!"

At this everybody laughs a little.

"*A bas les Jésuites!*" says Bruno, with a downward motion of his hands.

"What strikes me about the duchess is this," says Mrs. Wemyss, "that she makes me feel myself unreal. I am not Cecily Wemyss to her, but only a Violet Melrose or a Betsy, as the case may be. It is fatiguing, and productive of a sort of waking nightmare; to go

through life as a perpetual and actual Betsy would be more than weak woman could endure. I wonder what she is going to do with us when she gets us to the castle?"

"I anticipate the worst," says Bruno, gloomily. "Dick treats the whole thing as an immense joke; but I fear he will find himself in the wrong box."

"Oh, there won't be any boxes!" exclaims Sir Chicksy, kindly, who has just joined them. "Just a sort of small theatre, you know, and quite a plain stage."

"A clear stage and no favour," quotes Mr. Vyner, sadly. "What an awful thought! I was thinking of having a few humble friends to applaud me and throw me one or two hundred bouquets at a guinea apiece; but I suppose, from what Chaucer has just said, it would not be allowed. Bless me, in what a tyrannical age we live!"

"Compelled to act against our will," begins Bruno.

"Not against mine," interrupts Dolores, quickly. "Do you know I am quite delighted with the prospect of these private theatricals at the castle; though I'm sure I can't act a bit, never having even tried. You all seem sorry; but, as for me, I think it will be the greatest fun."

For a moment it occurs to Mrs. Wemyss that the little dove-eyed girl before her may be wickedly satirical; then she repents her of the notion.

Vyner laughs aloud.

"I believe we all think just as you do," he says, "and would be miserably disappointed if anything were to arise to scatter our hopes of making ourselves

‘fair names and famous’ out of these coming plays. But confession is bitter to us, and we love to play at indifference.”

“As good practice for the coming mummeries,” says Audrey, contemptuously.

“Dolores, come here and give us some tea,” calls Miss Maturin, her voice coming to them from over the soft turf. Dolores, rising, goes to her.

With little deft slender fingers she pours out the tea, and smiles upon the many men who throng around her, only too anxious to be her Mercuries. And yet, through all her smiles and kindest glances, the pathetic strain is shown, the faint sadness of a hidden regret, the shadow of a vague disappointment. He had *said* he would come; she had not so much depended on the delicate tenderness of his look or tone as on his spoken promise; she had been quite *sure* of his coming, she had dwelt upon his evident passionate desire to be with her, when, in the mystic calmness of her own pretty room, she lay awake watching the widening of the morn. She had risen in glad expectation of what the full day would bring to her, and now—now it is eventide, and all her sweet beliefs have crumbled into unsightly ashes, and the light of her soft hope has grown so dull as to be almost unseen by her. A barren hope indeed, productive of nought but secret and painful blushes, born of a hurt self-love, and something perhaps deeper still.

And then—*all at once*, as it seems to her—he is here, is coming to her over the cool sweet grass. With glad quick eyes and eager step he comes to where she is sitting in her white gown, with a graci-

ous smile upon her lips, and "blown soft hair and bright:" her *pretty* hair; it seems to him like the aureola of a saint surrounding that pure and lovely face, as he draws nearer, nearer still, until he is at her side.

She, seeing him, has grown a little pale, and has turned a disdainful shoulder somewhat in his direction, and let her mobile lips take a sweet haughty curve that suits them somehow, but should not be there for him. Leaning back in her chair, she turns up her face in a fashion a degree kinder than usual to the young man bending over her with lover-like assiduity, as it seems to the approaching Bouverie.

He is a very good, harmless young man, as that sort goes, named Horrocks (though more generally known as "Longcloth"), and has, indeed, nothing to do with this story beyond the fact that at this moment he awakens in Mr. Bouverie's breast a hatred as wild as it is unreasoning. He is hanging over Dolores, he is gazing with apparent delight into her eyes; and she—*she* whom he, Bouverie, had believed above the trivial cruelties of her sex—is smiling back at him as sweetly as though he was the male unit in the universe.

Paler and paler grows Dolores as she hears the approaching footstep; and yet it is with the calmest air in the world, and with the prettiest indifference, she acknowledges his greeting—which now has grown somewhat constrained—and puts her hand in his.

"Another cup of tea?" she asks, lazily, as though not clear as to whether she had given him one a moment since or not, and is therefore somewhat surprised at his fresh "How d'ye do?"

"I have not had one yet," returns he, rather taken aback by this unexpected question.

"No? What a shame! But I dare say you don't care about it. Men only pretend to like tea, it seems to me. And yet"—drawing up her brows reflectively, the little hypocrite—"I *did* think I gave you some just now."

"You gave me nothing," replies he, coldly; "not even a welcome," he could have added.

"It must have been to your brother then."

"Very possibly," says Bouverie, white with indignant disappointment, "as I have only just now come."

"Ah! so!" she says, as though slowly awaking to a possible fact, "*now* you have come, then? *now* when the others are all leaving? It was scarcely worth your while, was it? Sugar?" she smiles quite kindly—abominably kindly—at him as she says all this.

"No, thank you. Nothing—not even the tea. But you are wrong; it *was* worth my while to come. I have learned within the last few minutes the meaning of that strange word 'mutability.' The others are going, you say? Being only one among the many, I suppose I must go too?"

"Oh, no!"—with gracious indifference. "Not until it quite suits you."

"This very moment will suit me admirably."

"Now here, now gone," says she, with a little pale smile. "Well, don't let *me* detain you."

"I never dreamed you would so far trouble yourself, that would be too much to expect. To be allowed to come was the greatest grace to which I aspired."

"Humility is somebody's darling sin," murmurs

she, with a fine contempt and a flash from her large eyes. "That grace you coveted and gained might have enabled you to come here sooner."

"I think I came too soon!" retorts he, with sudden vehemence, the colour springing to his face. "I wish the road to Horton had been twice as long."

"To Horton!" It is her turn to change colour now; the blood recedes a little from her lips and brow. "Were you to Horton and back to-day?"

"Yes," shortly.

"It is thirty miles; but"—with sudden hope—"of course you went by train."

"Unfortunately," says he, smiling politely but coldly, "the train didn't suit. It was important I should see our man of business before the post went out in Horton, and no train from that would bring me home before eight o'clock."

"And wouldn't that have done?" asks Dolores, anxiously.

"It would, I suppose; but I didn't think so then—not when I was riding there and back, I mean. The only thought that possessed me during those thirty miles was that I could not well present myself to—to Miss Maturin at eight o'clock." He pauses, and looks at the sky with a rather barren admiration. "What a charming day you have had for the reception of your friends!" he says, indifferently.

She gives him to understand she agrees with him by a little movement of her head; but she says nothing, and stands before him trifling nervously with a spray of stephanotis; her lids are lowered. How can he tell, then, that her eyes are full of tears?

"You have quite got over last night's fatigue, I

hope?" he goes on, cruelly conventional because so sad at heart. Is it possible that he should now think of tender things to say to this girl to whom last night he gave his heart only to have it trodden on to-day? He is unconsciously cruel—needlessly miserable.

"Quite, thank you," she says, slowly; and then she turns away from him, and walks, with a sudden vague longing for comfort, to where Miss Maturin is standing at a little distance. Her eyes are dry again now, her head is uplifted, but her face is still pale, and her sensitive lips are touched with a shadowy pain. She had wronged him, that was only too true, she told herself; but how could she have known? He had been cold, bitterly so, and had refused to see how grieved she was when her mistake had become known to her. He had talked to her in a strange unfriendly voice of the beauty of the day—how *could* he have felt the beauty of it just then?—and had "hoped she had forgotten last night's fatigue," as might the commonest stranger! Had he forgotten, *quite*, that sweet last night, that now seems as though it had never been, and must for evermore be regarded as the mere gilded dream-child of an idle brain? And what was the meaning of that strange accusation he had brought against her—that charge of fickleness? Why should he tell her that she had taught him the signification of that sad word "mutability?" Well, it is all over now—all is at an end, if, indeed, one can speak of the end of anything that has had scarce a beginning. Perhaps he had not meant those few words last night; perhaps—and yet—— Yes; it is all for the best, no doubt; but—*why* had he said those words?

With a secret sense of bitterest self-contempt, she casts a hurried glance to where she had left him standing. But he is not there—he is not, indeed, anywhere. And, with a little catch at her heart, she tells herself that she was right. All—what a little all, and how sweet it now seems!—is surely at an end between them!

CHAPTER VIII.

“Thine eyes that are quiet, thine hands that are tender, thy lips
that are loving,
Comfort and cool me as dew in the dawn of a moon like a
dream.”

* * * * *

“O my lord, O Love,
I have laid my life at thy feet.”

SWINBURNE.

ANOTHER day is added to the mass of buried ages. Already it is high noon. The world, grown weary of June's jollity, is lying quiescent, lost in a languorous slumber.

Far overhead a tiny speck of quivering brown, grown mad with the mere ecstasy of living, is carolling aloud its fond praise of earth and its Creator. Down below a little dainty figure, clad all in white, and somewhat sad and somewhat dejected in its going, is wending its way through scented grasses and waving meadow.

“Crowds of bees are giddy with clover,
Crowds of grasshoppers skip at her feet,
Crowds of larks at their matins hang over,
Thanking the Lord for a life so sweet.”

A hot and radiant sun is sitting up above, holding a stately revel. All the heavens are spotted with pale clouds edged with faintest amber, whose youthful beauty is made even more conspicuous because of the presence of one sad sister, draped all in mournful grey

and tipped with gold, that hangs right over the clump of firs.

Dolores, glancing upwards at this forlorn little cloud, sighs resentfully, and tells herself that she resembles it; sad, despondent, angry! Alas for that sorry yesterday and all its attendant regrets! She clinches one small hand hastily, with a touch of softest self-disdain, and throws up her head impatiently.

All the morning depression had sat so persistently upon her, that at last it had seemed to her a good thing to bestir herself and go forth into the calm soft air, to see if that could not banish it. There is still a good deal of anger in her heart as she thinks of Mr. Bouverie (he had been "Dick" for one sweet night and half a day, but now is "Dick" no more). How eager he had been to accept her small mistake as a wilful incivility! How determinedly blind to her regret! Perhaps he had not noticed it—had thought her cold as himself! Well, a good thing too! But there is a pang at her heart as she tries to convince herself of this.

Behind the giant firs there is a little river, a brawling, noisy river that rushes headlong to the sea. It is a favourite of Dolores', and to it she turns her slow feet. The beauty of the day is lost upon her, the fair sweetness of the growing noontide and all its fuller lights and rich charms perfected, the faint sea-line upon the west, the delicate clearness of the hills, the misty light that floats tremulously low down between earth and sky, and the tender salt breath from the ocean that comes upward from the beach where the

"Dark green waves are lying
Foam-clad on the distant shore."

She has gathered a few dog-roses from the hedges, and put to them, in an idle, inconsequent fashion, some large marguerites that stare at her unblinkingly. With her white gown clinging to her and her great eyes fixed mournfully upon a future dark as midnight, she reaches her destination, and throws herself upon the bank of her beloved river, at the root of a gnarled old oak. Lifting her hat from her pretty roughened hair, she lays it on the sward beside her, and, taking her knees into her embrace, prepares to give herself up to saddest thought.

But she is too young, too innocent for this sort of thing. Close to her is the happy turbulent stream, so full of conversation that perforce it carries her attention away with it; and above her head the birds—fond little denizens of the branches round her—are calling to one another, and to her, in wild glad song that wakes the silence into life. Her thoughts wander; the tears within her eyes, finding themselves forgotten, die an early death.

All the sounds of Nature combine together to rouse this fair thing from her sad musings. She cannot resist their influence. The vague perfumes, the mellow music, all sink into her soul. She is at unison with them; her heart goes out to meet them. Truly this world is still full of great and generous promises although——

But what is this other sound that comes to her through the silken leaves? It rises above all the rest, and comes even nearer, nearer, nearer. It moves her as all the others have failed to do; it fills her with a sharp pain and a quick unrest. It is a voice.

Her colour deepens and then recedes again as she

recognizes it and knows it to belong to her *enemy*! To such an awful depth in her esteem has she consigned Bouverie since that last fatal interview, now twenty-four hours old!

Evidently he is not in grief! Yesterday's direful consequences have not afflicted him with that terrible malady called "low spirits." He is quite happy! He is *singing*! It would be impossible to describe the proper amount of indignation that consumes Dolores when the certainty is borne in upon her that he is actually trolling "Nancy Lee" in a clear joyous baritone. If it had been "Love Not," or some such melancholy ditty, she might have forgiven it; but "Nancy Lee!"

She rises to her feet, and, as he turns the corner all unconsciously, to find himself face to face with her, she advances towards him a step or two.

"You!" says he, startled out of all more conventional addresses and letting the obnoxious "Nancy" go to the winds.

"Yes—me!" returns she, icily, and not at all grammatically. But of what account is grammar when outraged self-love is at hand? Her very acidity revives Bouverie and restores him to his usual calm.

"I beg your pardon," he says, politely, pitching his cigar into the river. "I fear I addressed you rather unceremoniously; but, the fact is, I was so surprised to meet any one here that I forgot myself—not that any amount of surprise could be an excuse for ill-manners."

"No," says Dolores, indifferently. She is looking from him—far down the little river to where the great sea lies basking in the sunshine—and has evidently developed an overpowering interest in a sea-gull that is flitting to and fro upon the tiny wavelets like a

fleck of burnished silver. It is as though she has altogether forgotten Bouverie's presence.

He makes a movement as if to leave her, and half lifts his hat; then, as though against his will, pauses.

"Did you walk here?" he asks, in a tone he fondly but erroneously believes to be as indifferent as her own.

"Yes," says Miss Lorne, in just the same uninterested fashion as before. Her shoulder is now a little turned in his direction.

"Through the meadows?" persists he, some acerbity in his manner.

"Yes," replies she again. This is too much!

"Do you always speak in monosyllables?" demands he, wrathfully.

"You have known me long enough to be able to answer that question for yourself," returns she, calmly.

"I see. Of course I must understand that—you wish me to leave you. But what have I done?" asks the young man, indignantly, "that you won't even speak to me?"

"I have spoken to you," says Dolores, coldly; but now there is a little something in her voice that does not exactly encourage or hold out hope to him, but yet gives him an excitement to pour out before her his pent-up grievance.

"Yes; but in what a way! How have I offended you? Was it such a crime, my being late yesterday? Or was it——" He stops abruptly and looks at her with miserable uncertainty in his eyes.

"Why should you believe I was offended yesterday?" asks she, suddenly. His question had touched her unpleasantly. A little anger flames into her eyes

and deadens the sweetness of her lips. Was her disappointment then so palpable to everybody? She sinks as if hurt.

"You are wrong," she says, with a little catch in her breath.

"I suppose so. I hardly dared hope I was right. I should have known that your displeasure did not arise out of yesterday, but out of the night before. Those last words I said to you—I should not have said them; you had given me no right. If you mean me to understand that I must not repeat them"—his voice has grown somewhat husky. Closing his fingers more tightly upon the slight stick he is holding in both hands, it snaps in two; he flings the pieces far from him with an impatient jerk. "I shall never trouble you in that way again," he says, and turns, as if to continue his way through the wood.

"Do not go because of me," says Dolores, in a low voice. "I—— Auntie will be expecting me. I must go home at once."

She is standing upon a little green mound, and as she speaks she steps down from it; in so doing, her foot comes upon a sharp piece of broken stone, which causes her such pain that involuntarily her foot turns under her. It is all the work of an instant. She lays her hand upon the trunk of the tree to keep herself from falling, and the very lowest faintest cry of agony escapes her; it is so faint as to be almost imperceptible; but

"Lovers' eyes are sharp to see,
And lovers' ears in hearing,"

and Bouverie feels she has come to grief.

"You have hurt yourself," he says, going anxiously up to her.

"It is nothing," returns she, still coldly, and with determined self-possession, though her lips have grown rather white. "I assure you it is nothing."

"It certainly is something," says Bouverie, quietly, feeling sick at heart as he notices the pained lines round her sensitive mouth. "You have hurt your foot. You must allow me to see you home."

"There is really no reason why you should," says Dolores. "I beg you will give yourself no trouble on my account. See—I can walk very well."

And, indeed, for one or two yards she manages to move alone; but then she falters, and a quick breath tells of increasing agony.

"You had better take my arm," says Dick, coldly, but with passionately suppressed anxiety.

"No, thank you. I am sure I can get on by myself," returns she; but, though she says it, she seems afraid to take the next step.

"What is the good of your persisting in this folly?" exclaims Bouverie, angrily. "Do you want to be laid up for a month? Take my arm directly, or"—ungraciously—"shall I carry you? Perhaps it will be better——"

"No, no"—indignantly—"certainly not! I do not want your—any help at all."

There are tears in her beautiful eyes, and not only her lips, but all her face is now quite colourless.

"Yes, you do," says Dick, obstinately; and, coming close to her, he passes his arm round her. She makes no protest, but it is evident to him that she dislikes his support. Together, and in silence, they go on

again for a little while; and then, seeing that she is still enduring great pain, he ventures on another protest.

"You *know* you are suffering horribly," he says, with some vehemence. "Why won't you let me carry you? It isn't such a very long way, and it will be so much better for you. *Do* try to understand"—savagely—"that I have no desire whatever to carry you for my own part—that I think you would be rather heavy than otherwise—but that I can't bear to see any creature in pain."

To this extremely rude exhortation she makes no reply beyond a faint effort to withdraw herself from his supporting arm, which he silently refuses to let her do.

Yet a few steps farther they go, and then all at once Dolores stands quite still upon the woodland path, and gazes at him with wide, agonized, almost imploring eyes.

"Oh, this is madness!" cries Bouverie, and in a moment, without further leave from her, he has her in his arms, and is carrying her with slow care in the direction of her home.

How light she is! What a frail burden! His heart smites him as he remembers how a moment since he alluded to her as being probably heavy. Would that she were indeed a little heavier than she is! Why there is scarce an air of heaven but would blow away this fragile creature! What a poor hold upon its life must this slender frame possess!

His heart is beating madly as he holds her to it, yet there is a set, angry expression upon his brow and a displeased curve about his lips. Only yester-

day he would have deemed it bliss to be allowed to keep her hand unforbidden within his, yet, now he has all her sweet body in his arms, no joy is his! Her pretty head, crowned with its soft, short, sunny rings of hair, is lying upon his shoulder. Her face is very near to his. Oh, how hard a thing it seems that love alone should be far from him!

Once he ventured to look down upon her, to lift her head to a position a degree more comfortable; but, as he does it, he feels that she stirs uneasily in his arms, and shrinks from him. This last mark of her aversion cuts him to the soul!

"Is my very touch so hateful to you?" he asks, the more roughly because of his love and the misery he is enduring; but she makes him no reply, and only turns her face against the sleeve of his coat so that it is hidden from him.

What a cold, cruel child she is! Can she not fathom his love? Cannot the very greatness of it move her even to pity, that poorest of all consolations to a lover's heart? "So young and so untender!" Great heavens, why was a heart given him only to waste it on a girl who cares as much for him as—— Well, well, many men have known disappointments of this kind, and have lived through them; but surely none so keen as his, for they have not known Dolores! To endure is the lot of all; but to be so deliberately spurned by a mere child!

Just at this moment a stifled sound breaks upon his ear, and he feels the little form in his arms quiver; again that sorrowful sound, and then all at once he knows that she is crying.

Despair seizes upon him. Is he born only to dis-

tress and grieve this innocent creature? He stands quite still, scarce knowing what to do, and feels that the arms that encircle her are trembling. Then very gently he places her upon the ground, still supporting her strongly so that her injured foot may come to no harm, and looks at her with anguish in his kindly eyes.

“Oh, Dolores, what is this?” he says, with deep agitation. “Am I indeed so distasteful to you? There, see—I have placed you on the ground again, and will help you as unobtrusively as I can until I get you home. Think of me as though I were only a stick or a stone, either of which,” says Mr. Bouverie, with a sudden burst of misery, “I wish with all my soul I was, as then feeling would be dead within me. Why must my love bring me only a curse? Oh, dear, *dear* heart, take pity on me and try at least not to hate me!”

His voice dies away from him, and he waits in a sort of nervous dread for the answer that may come. It is long in coming, and the silence that follows upon his words grows more oppressive every moment. Oh! earth so fresh and fair, have you no sound to break it? Where are your minions? The birds are hushed as if of one accord, their songs no longer sanctify the air, the soft gurgling of the river grows every moment fainter, lower; as it passes mournfully by to the great ocean, it seems to him to murmur hopelessly, “Dolores, Dolores!”

By an effort he rouses himself from the painful apathy into which he is falling.

“It is cruel to torment you so,” he says, wearily.

"If you must hate me, why, you must!" There is a touch of Oriental resignation about this last remark; and, indeed, he has resigned himself to the worst; but Dolores breaks the spell.

"Ah, it is just that," she says, suddenly, with a quick sob, "I cannot bear you to think it! It isn't *true*. Hate you? Oh, no, *no!*"

"If not that," says Bouverie, in a strange tone, "what?" There is a lengthy pause, then,—

"Oh, Dick," she murmurs, in an agonized tone, "don't you think you could guess it? I couldn't say it; but—but——"

"Is it that you love me?" says Bouverie. Even to himself his voice sounds changed; he tries to put her back from him that he may see her face, but she resists him and hides it away from him upon his breast.

"Darling," whispers he, in a low, impressive tone, "is it my wife I hold?"

There is a moment's cruellest suspense, into which no man may enter, and then,—

Two soft arms steal round his neck, and a little velvet cheek is laid against his—a delicate flushed cheek, all warm and wet with tears.

"Oh, Dick!" sighs she. "Oh, dear, *dear* Dick!"

It is enough! Upon the spot Bouverie's doubts desert him, and a certainty full of blessedness takes him into its keeping. How changed is all the world! Overhead once more the birds have burst into a joyful pæan, the river, erstwhile dumb, is now loudly chanting a psalm full of marvellous delights. Not heaven itself could grant him a happiness more complete

than *she* has conveyed to him in her fond faltering words.

* * * * *

"But we mustn't forget your foot," he says, presently. "Does it hurt much now?"

"It is better, ever so much better; I really hardly feel it now. Isn't that odd?" says Dolores, opening her eyes in a bewitching fashion. "There isn't half the pain in it that there was before"—with a sweet little blush—"before we were—friends."

"Lovers," says Dick.

"Yes, lovers," admits she, with unmistakable delight. "Do you know, I think, when one is miserable in mind one feels one's body more? I fancy I am almost well now; see——"

She places her foot bravely on the ground, and takes a step forward with quite an undaunted front. It is only one step, and it leaves her when completed somewhat flushed, and with a tiny wrinkle on her brow.

"Ah, it does ache still!" she says, with deep disappointment. "You are not so good a doctor after all; it burns like fire; I think perhaps if I had my shoe off—eh?"

"Come down to the river and let me bathe it for you," says Dick. "When it is cooler, it will feel better; and I dare say the shoe is pinching it now."

"It must be then because the foot is swelled," says Miss Lorne, glancing at her perfect feet and her Parisian shoes, with their wonderful heels, with a very pardonable pride, "because I *assure* you"—with extreme earnestness—"these shoes are quite too large for me; I can step into them without a shoehorn!"

"Of course you can; they are disgracefully loose," says Dick, who is fast developing into an unimpeachable courtier. "And what little shoes they are! Why, they would be too small for a baby!"

"They *are* small, aren't they?" she says, with a burst of irrepressible pleasure. Then she looks ashamed of herself and lowers her head. "Auntie says my mother had little feet," she murmurs shyly, almost apologetically. There is something wonderfully loveable about the faint touches of diffidence that betray themselves in her now and then.

"Talking of Miss Maturin," says Dick, "what will she say to me as a nephew—eh?"

"All that is good," declares Dolores, with settled conviction. "She"—naïvely—"she will be *delighted* with you. It was only last evening that she was running you up to the very skies, and calling you all sorts of pretty names."

"And you—how did you answer her?"

"Ah!" murmurs she, with a little coquettish grimace. "You must remember that last night I hated you. No name I could have invented would have been bad enough for you. But help me down to the river now, and see what can be done for me. Let us try the cold-water cure before we throw ourselves on auntie's mercies and frighten her to death."

The river is but six or seven yards away from them. Having been carefully carried to it, Miss Lorne seats herself upon the bank, and desiring her companion to turn his head away, proceeds to divest herself of stocking and shoe. It hurts her more than she imagines it would do, and at the close of the operation she says,—

"*Ach!*"—with a little sigh of relief. This vague remark brings him to her side again in no time.

Filling his hat with water, he proceeds to bathe the pretty naked foot with all the gentleness of a woman.

"Is it easier now?" he asks, presently.

"The fierce heat has gone out of it. Yes, it is a great deal easier. Watch my shoe, or it will fall into the river."

He rescues it from its impending grave, and then turns it over and over in his hands admiringly.

"What high heels," he says, laughingly. "They must add quite two cubits to your stature. Why, if they were taken off, you would be nowhere."

He says all this most lovingly; but at his words her face clouds. She sighs faintly, and plays with the ribbons on her gown.

"Dick," she says at last, nervously, "would you love me better if I were taller? It isn't a good thing to be so very small, is it? Perhaps you like great—that is—what they call '*fine*' women—do you?"

She pauses, and leans towards him, very deep anxiety in her lustrous eyes.

"May heaven in its mercy defend me from all such!" says Dick, piously. "If there is one thing on earth I loathe, it is a fleshy woman."

"Ah, so do I!" laughs she, delightedly, slipping her arm once more round his neck. "You can't think what a relief it is to me to know that you agree with me on that point. *Poor* big women"—with growing pity—"they are always in the way, aren't they? And muslins and cambrics are so impossible to them. It

is very sad for them, I think, because, after all, they can't help growing, you know, can they?"

"I'm very much obliged to *you* for helping it, at all events," says Bouverie, "though, when we come to think of it, we are only talking the most excessive nonsense. Were you taller than the most gigantic Amazon ever grown, with that angel face of yours, I should still adore you, and hold you in my heart higher than all the world."

There is a passion in his manner that subdues her and pales her pretty cheeks.

"Dolores," he goes on quickly, some of the old fear waking in him, "are you sure you have no misgiving—none? No uncertainty in your heart about your love for me? Think—in pity to us both, my beloved—think of this *now* whilst yet there is time. Time!"—he rises to his feet, and puts her back from him. "Already there is *no* time," he says. "My very soul is yours from this day forth, to ruin or to save."

"Ah!" whispers she, softly, great tears springing to her eyes. "If you could only know how I felt yesterday, when I believed you—you did not care for me, you would let no such cruel doubts rise within you! Come back to me, Dick! Do not stand over there as if you hated me. Come"—holding out her arms—"come at once. You know"—with a reproachful glance at her foot—"I cannot go to you."

"It seems all too good to believe," says Dick, lifting her slender hand and kissing the fingers one by one. "Sweetheart! *whose* happiness is as great as mine?"

At this the smile returns to her lips; but still

there is a faint regret within her eyes. She bends towards him.

"Was I very bad to you a while ago?" she whispers. "Was I very cross to you, my poor boy? What did I say then? What cruel words did I use? Scold me for them. And yet, no, my punishment lay in the uttering of them! They vexed me even more than they vexed you. Dick, you *did* mean it then, after all."

"What, darling?"

"What you said to me the night of your mother's ball, just as I was leaving. About"—she pauses, and turns a button of his coat round and round between her fingers in a nervous, confused fashion.

"About what, then?"

He remembers perfectly, but cannot resist the longing to hear what she will say.

"About holding me in your heart," she whispers, so low that he has to stoop to hear her. Yet she lifts her head as she says it, and smiles tremulously, though he can see that tears stand thick within her eyes. "You did mean it?"

"Oh that I could tell you all I mean!" exclaims he, with passionate fondness. "Dolores, why are there tears in your eyes?"

"Because of my joy," murmurs she, sweetly. Then she puts her hand upon his breast and looks at him curiously. "Are you glad?" she asks.

"Glad!" says Dick.

"Ah, so am I! Yesterday I was so afraid I had lost you for ever, and now to-day you are mine; an

hour ago, and all things looked so dull, so colourless, that it seemed to me"—dreamily—"as if it wasn't much use to be alive! But now"—with a quick change of colour and a radiant smile—"all that is at an end;—Dick, shall I tell auntie all about—about you and me?"

"Of course," says Dick, with animation. "The sooner the better. All the world should be told, and at once. The moment I reach home I shall tell my mother."

Dolores shrinks from him.

"Oh, no; not yet,—not quite yet!" she says, growing very pale, "Do not tell your mother *yet!*"

"But why not, my dearest? How you change colour! Surely you are not afraid of my mother?"

"No, no!"—hastily; then, with a sudden shame-faced truthfulness and an adorable downward motion of the head, "It is true though; I *am* afraid of her."

"But, darling, how absurd! Why, she will be very proud when she finds what a sweet daughter-in-law I am going to give her!"

"Oh, it isn't that!" says Dolores, with a sudden faint flush and a touch of dignity that sits very charmingly upon her and endears her to him the more. "I do not dream that she will object to me; but there is something about her—I cannot explain it; but——" she pauses, and a little curious light comes into her eyes—"I am sure she will do me harm yet!" she says, slowly. "*She* will be the one to destroy my happiness—to——" Again she pauses. She has grown deadly white, and now she raises one hand to

her head in a terrified fashion—the pupils of her large eyes have dilated nervously.

“Dolores, what are you saying?” exclaims Bouverie, shocked by her expression. Taking down her uplifted hand, he holds it closely in his own. His touch seems to soothe her. She sighs painfully, and then all at once the frightened look vanishes, and a smile, sweet, but languid, returns to her lips.

“I have been talking nonsense,” she says, with an attempt at lightness. “But still, do you know”—looking at him with a pathetic meaning—“I feel very heavy at heart. Do not tell your mother, Dick, for *my* sake! Will not our love be all the sweeter if but known to us two alone?” She creeps closer to him, and lays her cheek coaxingly in a childish fashion against his. “Let our secret be a secret for a little while. Only auntie need know—and, after all, auntie is one with us.”

“It shall be all exactly as you wish,” says Dick, caressing her. “But my father? He, at least, might know. He will not betray us; and he is very dear to me. Do not forbid him to be a sharer in my joy.”

“Our joy,” she says, tenderly. “Yes, tell him. But do not let your mother know for a while.”

“We’ll make it an elopement case, if you like, and then she need never know of our engagement at all,” returns Bouverie, laughing.

His change of manner seems to reassure her and rouse her from her vague fears.

“You grow frivolous!” she says, austere. “It is time, evidently, to think of home.”

“But how is your foot now?”

"Really better this time."

"Well, let me bathe it once more, and then we will think of rising up and going on our way."

Again the unfortunate hat, now in a limp and wretched state, is plunged into the flowing river. Again her little foot is tenderly bathed by the most loving hands in the world. When he has dried it with his pocket-handkerchief, very carefully, lest he should hurt it, he stoops and imprints a kiss upon the snowy arch of the instep.

"Darling foot! My *own* foot!" he whispers to it very low.

Miss Lorne draws it away from him with a pretty pretence at petulance.

"If you love my foot more than me, I shall be jealous of it and lead it a bad life," she says, with a soft blush. "But"—starting anxiously—"we really must go now! I think"—with some embarrassment—"if you were to go and sit just over there, on that big stone—see it?—with your back to me, I could manage to get on my—my—shoe again."

"Get on your stocking," says Mr. Bouverie, who scorns subterfuge; "but never mind the shoe—it will only hurt you."

"Go and sit where I tell you," says Miss Lorne with sudden dignity, very properly taking no notice of his advice. "And be sure you don't turn your head until I give you leave."

She manages to get on the shoe in spite of him, but the walk home is a slow one, and rather painful. However, she will not allow him to come with her farther than the wicket-gate that leads to the shrubberies and from thence to the house.

"Why can't I come on with you now and tell Miss Maturin all about it?" asks Dick, who cannot bear to picture her limping all alone to the house. He lingers hopefully, hanging on to the top bar of the gate, as though loth to let her go.

"No; it will be a little shock to her, and I would rather tell her myself. But don't be afraid of that"—sweetly; "I know she will be pleased; only—I have been her baby, you see, for so long that she will hate to—to *divide* me with another. Do you know, Dick"—turning to him thoughtfully in the calm twilight, and uplifting her lucent eyes to his—"I was going to say to part with me; but you would never try to part auntie and me, would you?"

"I would not, indeed," says Dick, very earnestly.

"Good-by now, until to-morrow."

She stands on tip-toe and slips her arms round his neck, and holds up her face to his without a suspicion of *mauvaise honte*, and kisses him with all the passionate warmth of a loving child.

Then she turns away and goes slowly down the path that leads her from him. Slowly always, but presently more slowly still, until at last she comes to a dead stop.

All this he notes, leaning still upon the little rustic gate, and watching her every movement with a jealous care.

When she does come to a standstill, she looks round, and after a short hesitation comes back to him and is once again received within his willing arms.

"I have come back," she says, laughing rather shyly, and very much out of breath from her exertion, "because I felt sure you were feeling lonely without

me. I knew that, because"—she laughs again here rather confusedly, and refuses to let her eyes meet his—"because"—softly—"I felt so awfully lonely without you!"

"My little sweet soul!" says Dick.

"Before I go—*for really*, this time," whispers she, smoothing the short hair from his temples with nervous loving fingers—"say—*say it all over again!*"

"I love, love, *love* you," whispers he back, straining her to his heart, with a true lover's instinct guessing the answer to her vague request. There is something akin to thankfulness within his heart, as he holds her in his arms and looks into her beautiful earnest eyes, and knows the power of the pure love for her that has reached a perfect growth within his heart.

As for her, tremulous tears have risen within her eyes, and, though her smile still lingers, it is now graver, more tender.

"I love you too," she says, in a low voice, "and shall for ever and ever!"

There is something that is almost solemn in her glance as she withdraws herself from his embrace and once more moves away. At the corner, she turns and waves to him a last adieu.

Nothing is left him now but the pale far-off shimmer of her white gown as it gleams here and there through the trees, lit by the earlier summer moon that is already sailing tranquilly through the pale blue ether up above. With an almost absurd anxiety he watches the white robe appear and disappear. Now it is here—now gone—now it comes again, and now indeed is altogether lost! But all is not lost with it! Hope remains, and love, and the memory of her.

“My love, my own soul’s heart, more dear
Than mine own soul
Who hath my being between the hands of her.”

A star has come out in the heavens, one pale
tranquil thing, above in the vast dome. To Dolores,
his heart’s queen, he likens it, as he takes his home-
ward way.

CHAPTER IX.

“Love lay upon her eyes.”

“There is no woman living that draws breath
So sad as I, though all things sadden her.”

SWINBURNE.

SLOWLY, a little reluctantly, Mr. Bouverie's love makes her progress to the house. She tries to believe she is in mad haste to tell her tale, yet welcomes gladly any delay that kindly Nature offers her. Impedimenta of a manufactured sort obstruct her way. Here she stops beside a flower-bed to pluck a glowing “Anna Boleyn,” and beheads it, like its mournful namesake, under a mistaken impression that she wants it to make more sweet her room; and here she lingers to hearken to the singing of some sleepy bird, trying earnestly—oh, cruel child!—to believe it a cry of pain. And anon she stoops to lift a tiny beetle crossing the gravelled pathway, to lay it tenderly upon the scented grass and speed it kindly homewards. Yet this last simple action only makes for her a life-long enemy. That beetle sorely resents her interference, being well on his homeward way already, when in an evil hour she met him and placed him *how* many beetle miles backward on his journey no man knoweth!

All these delays are so many wily devices of hers to lengthen out her road and ward off for a season

the impending interview. It had seemed so easy to say she would tell auntie all about it, but now that the time for telling draws so nigh it appears to her terribly hard. How is she to begin? What words must she use? What if her news should be unfavourably received? For the first time it occurs to her that auntie is tremendously tall! Yes, it will indeed be difficult to approach her. Oh, if she should laugh at her, and tell her she is a silly baby—too young a child to know what true love means! What then? “The deluge,” says Miss Lorne to herself.

At the laurustinas her heart has first begun to fail her; now that she is at the hall-door there is not left to her so much as one poor shred of courage. She mounts the stone steps, and, with her suffering “Anna Boleyn” clasped to suffocation in her little trembling hand, enters the open door and moves quickly up the grim old hall.

It is half-past six by the big clock—later than she had imagined. But lovers’ hours are long, and a very few of them would go to the day were we to accept their calculation. By this time Lallie will be sitting in the drawing-room lost in her *Times*, or perhaps “Belinda”—most probably indeed the latter.

Opening the door with all the outward seeming of a Cæsar, but with a quaking heart, she enters the room. Yes, auntie is here with her “Belinda,” and the fat Skye, and the cat, and tea.

“You have come!” cries Miss Maturin, starting into life, and letting both “Belinda” and the Skye slide from her with a little dull thud to the floor—treatment the Skye resents with numerous snuffles and

a succession of spasmodic barks that threaten to choke him every moment and bring him to an untimely grave.

"How long you have been! — not long really, I suppose; but I am always fussy, you see, and of course I miss you. Foolish old women like me are sure to be troublesome. Come over here, darling, and have your tea."

"I thought you would have finished your tea by this time."

"Well, so I should if you had been with me; but I put it off as long as I could, waiting for you; then I grew greedy," with a soft laugh, "and told myself I must have it, or die!"

"Ah, why did you wait?" says Dolores. She draws nearer, and, kneeling down beside Miss Maturin, slips her arms round her waist. "I have been unkind to you, Lallie," she says, in remorseful accents. "I should not have left you alone for such a long, long time."

"Nonsense, my kitten! I have been as happy as possible. Conceited child! Do you then think I cannot live without you?"

"I do; because I know I could not live without you!" In her manner there is a subdued but tender rush of feeling. She draws her auntie's face down close to her and folds her in a warm embrace.

There is something so fervent in the kiss the girl bestows upon her that Miss Maturin is slightly but unconsciously awakened by it to the inevitable ending of this drama. She puts Dolores back from her, and gazes at her earnestly.

"How sweet you are looking!" she says, fondly,

"but a little pale, as it seems to me. Did your walk fatigue you?"

"Oh, no!"

"You enjoyed it?"

"Very, *very* much," says Dolores, with unthinking force. Then she colours crimson beneath her aunt's scrutiny, and, rising to her feet, goes over to the window, where her features at least are beyond observation.

Sinking into the cushioned old-fashioned seat, she turns her face eastward and gazes dreamily upon the fast darkening landscape outside. Slowly the shades of gentle night are descending, spreading a filmy pall over earth and sea, through which the trembling moonbeams soon will make a way.

Mingled with the soft calm twilight is a tinge of melancholy—a birth of sorrow, plaintive, vague, shadowy, but felt! It mingles with the air and fills all the dusky corners of the rose-garden. There comes a moan from the ocean, and from the village—far, far away—the solemn tolling of a passing bell.

The living, the loving, the dying, all are mixed together in the strange phantasmagoria that we call life. From earth we spring to laugh or cry awhile—to sport in the lavish sunshine with mad mirth or mope disconsolate within the shade—and then, to earth we go! A birth—a questionable joy—a death! And there is more of the crying than the laughing!

Miss Maturin has taken up her knitting. The girl, with bent head and graceful white-robed figure, is pondering on the subtleties of life and death. A delicate fragrance of dying flowers comes from the pleasure without.

With a little sigh, Dolores raises her slender figure into a more upright position, and prepares herself for the moment that shall make a third person a participator in her sweet secret.

"Lallie!" she says, very slowly, and then pauses; she draws herself well within the shelter of the lace curtains, and waits guiltily for some encouragement to proceed.

"Well, darling?" asks Miss Maturin, placidly, picking up a dropped stitch.

"Were—were you ever in love, Lallie?"

Miss Maturin laughs, with a certain sense of amusement. As yet the truth is far from her.

"No, my dear—never," she says, so promptly as to preclude all possibility of doubt.

Dolores seems disappointed.

"I thought perhaps—you have such a sweet sad expression, that—that——"

"I had been disappointed in love, and was still pining for the refractory one?" supplies Miss Maturin, gaily. "No, no; I never loved any man; I never felt that I should *like* to love any man. I suppose the confession will make me suffer horribly in your esteem; but the fact is, I had only two offers in all my life, so that my range of choice was not unlimited."

"But those two?" says Dolores, who, being in love herself, feels of course soft-hearted and inclined to the belief that one of the two discarded ones must surely have been worthy of favour.

"As for them," declares Miss Maturin, with quite youthful vivacity, "why, I remember them as though it was only yesterday."

"What—*both* of them?" asks Dolores, curiously, who

would have thought it more romantic had one only been given a place in her memory.

"Yes, both," says Miss Maturin, with disgraceful enjoyment in her recollection. "Heavens! What a snuffy old man the first was! He might have been my grandfather then—my father even now. He hadn't a tooth in his venerable head, and his gold-headed stick was the only useful leg he possessed."

"And the other?" asks Dolores; but there is only faint hope in her tone. Had there been any sweet sad recollection in her past, auntie could not have possibly answered her in that jubilant fashion.

"The other! Oh, dear me," says Miss Maturin, laying her knitting down to idle upon her knees, and knitting her brows instead, "when I think of that young man, I always wonder why it was he was allowed to go around alone without a keeper. It couldn't have been want of funds, as he was immensely rich, quite a millionaire, poor soul!"

"What was the matter with him?" asks Dolores, discarding the protection of the lace curtains in her anxiety to hear the true and unvarnished tale of this sad wooer. "Was he——"

"Yes, he was," says Miss Maturin, agreeably—"quite mad! He was about the very worst lunatic any one ever saw out of an asylum. If he had just been one shade nearer perfection in his own line of business he would have made intimate acquaintance with Colney Hatch; but no such luck was mine; he remained a *harmless* imbecile just to torment me."

With an injured shake of her handsome head, Miss Maturin resumes her stocking.

The girl's gaze still wanders dreamily outwards.

"What an evening it is!" she says at last in a low voice, full of intensest admiration. "See how those pale clouds have dropped, as it were, into the heart of the ocean! What a perfect mingling! What a clear calm light! Look at that opalescent bar over there."

"A fair evening indeed," agrees Miss Maturin, gazing at the far-off horizon with a deep satisfaction. "A most exquisite mingling. A very 'bridal of the earth and sky.'"

"A bridal?" repeats Dolores, softly, flushing a delicate pink. "Shall I ever be a bride, auntie? Do you ever think that some day perhaps I shall?"

"A *bride*? No, no, it is impossible!" exclaims Miss Maturin, with sudden curious vehemence. She looks askance at her niece, and a quick pallor overspreads her face. One might almost imagine that it was terror itself had blanched it. She sighs heavily, and sinks back in her chair, as one might who has been touched and scorched by a breath of passing fear.

"Why, auntie!" says Dolores, gazing at her with large, startled eyes. "What is it you say?" Then timidly, "Why should it be impossible? Other girls get married."

"Ay, *other* girls!" says Miss Maturin, in a low voice akin to a groan. She seems to have lost all her self-control, and the words fall from her as though in despite of her will.

"Am I, then, different from all the rest?" questions Dolores, with a smile. It is a rather wistful smile. What if Lallie will disapprove of her engagement and look coldly on her Dick?

"Why should you imagine that?" says Miss Maturin, hastily. "Tut, child! You must not mind me."

She is speaking more lightly now, and has evidently recovered in part her usual manner. "Forget what I have said, or remember only that the very thought of parting with you causes me such pain that words slipped from me that—that were unmeant. To lose you now—after all these years!"

"We should not be parted," says Dolores, gravely. "Have I not just told you that I could not live without you? We two shall never part, Lallie, be sure of that."

"Well, well, sweetheart, the subject grows too much for us, and we ourselves are needlessly thoughtful over a dream that may never be fulfilled. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'" Miss Maturin, as she says this, smiles faintly.

"Why should it be evil?" asks Dolores, regarding her earnestly—perhaps reproachfully. To call a marriage with Dick—an "evil!"

"Why, indeed?" says Miss Maturin, with an attempt at lightness. "But tell me of your walk, darling child. Where did you go? Whom did you meet? Nobody, I fear, in this quiet neighbourhood. Sometimes I am afraid you will learn what loneliness really means during your solitary rambles."

"I was not solitary to-day," says Dolores. "I did meet somebody."

Her pale cheeks glow and her sensitive mouth trembles as she makes this confession. But to deceive Lallie in any way would be not only abhorrent to her, but, indeed—to do her sweet nature full justice—utterly impossible.

"I met — Mr. Bouverie." She had almost said "Dick," and now feels remorseful at heart, and as

though she has in some way been unkind to her lover by the use of his more formal appellation.

"I am glad of that," returns Miss Maturin, unsuspiciously. "I like that young man; he is so bright, so natural. Did you meet him soon after you left me?"

"As I got down to the river, he came there to," says Dolores, leaning eagerly forward and speaking with glad interest. Her beautiful eyes are sparkling; she has found a mine of happiness in those words—"I like that young man!" Yes, yes, she knew it! Who could *help* liking him? "He stayed there with me all the time," she goes on, nervously, "until I said I should come home; and then he walked back with me, and he wanted to come in and see you; but——"

Her voice dies away. How difficult a thing it is to declare aloud the first love of one's heart!

Miss Maturin makes no reply. She is feeling numbed and sick at heart. Whatever cruel thing is gnawing at her heart is doing its work effectually; the girl's last words are working into her brain. "Three long hours," she says to herself, "three long hours!" An expression of sickening anxiety grows upon her white face, and there is, too, a strange, mournful, despairing look about her as she glances furtively at the pretty dainty figure in the window, sitting with calm folded hands and with a light as of heaven within her happy eyes.

"Lallie," says Dolores, after a lengthened pause, "do you think that people, who have never been in love themselves, can sympathize with or understand those who—who *do* love?"

Greyer and greyer grows Miss Maturin's face. Reluctantly she compels herself to gaze upon the girl's flushed, averted features, and then a great change sweeps over her. First there is passionate regret, and then desolation, and then despair.

But she masters herself! Love, the all-powerful, helps her to do this; for the girl must never know. It is a wonderful mastery over self, however, and proves the strength of the soul within her; but it tears her heart in twain. Her lips are bloodless; yet she forces a smile to them as she turns boldly and answers the girl, who is the one sole thing she clings to upon earth.

"I do indeed," she says, quietly. Alas for the cruel strain that gives this calm! "Do you mean that I could not sympathize with—let us say—*you* in such a case?" She pauses for a moment and then goes on again: "And so you are in love, child?"

She has risen from her seat, and Dolores has risen too.

"Oh, Lallie—oh, dear, *dear* Lallie!" cries the girl, tremulously, turning a face, now pale as a newborn snowdrop, to Miss Maturin. She makes a step forward and holds out her arms. "Ah, love me still!" she cries, a little incoherently perhaps, but with an intuitive fear that Miss Maturin might think herself forgotten, neglected, thrust from the first place in her tender heart. Almost it seems to her that she—*she*—has been the one to inflict a lasting injury upon the faithful soul who has been to her all that her lost mother possibly could be.

"It is so, then," says Miss Maturin. She has the frail little figure in a close embrace by this time, and

is bending over it in speechless grief—a grief unknown, unguessed by Dolores. “*I* am ‘dear Lallie;’ and *he* is ‘dearest Dick’ for the future—is not that it?”

There is no answer—only the soft arms cling to her and the pretty rings of hair stir uneasily upon her breast.

“How did you know it was Dick?” comes a little whisper to her presently.

“Have I no eyes in my head? And yet —— No; I knew nothing until five minutes ago; your manner told me. Well, I am content to take second place—at least, I *am* second—is it not?”

“No,” says Dolores, firmly, throwing back her head and looking earnestly at her aunt, “not that! These two loves I hold now within my heart are so different, yet both so great, that I could not make one second to the other. He is first in his, you are first in yours; you shall never be second, my own Lallie!”

“Fond little heart!” says Miss Maturin, pressing the sunny head down once again upon her breast. She is, after all, happier when the child’s innocent eyes are not looking into hers. “And so you love him well?” she says.

“And he loves me. Is it not all quite wonderful?” She passes over her aunt’s question as though it requires no answer, which in truth it does not. “He wanted to tell his mother about—about it all; but I said only you should know of it just yet; there is plenty of time to——”

“Yes, yes—time, *time!*” says Miss Maturin, with agitation. “That is the principal thing. Let us keep it a secret between us three as long as we can; it—it

will be so much happier for you—for us all—no one prying or asking questions—or—— Yes, let it be *quite* a secret!” She ceases, and laughs almost hysterically. “Don’t you see,” she says, nervously, “how much better it would be?”

“So I said,” murmurs Dolores, eagerly. “It seems even sweeter—our love I mean,”—shyly—“when only you and I and Dick know of it; you—you are pleased about it, auntie?”

“I have but one thought about it, and that is what is best for your happiness.”

“Dick is best,” returns she, with a coy little laugh. “Don’t you think so, Lallie?”

“I suppose so, darling.”

“Why don’t you say something nice about him, then? Is he not the best and dearest fellow in all the world? Is he not handsome?”

“Not so handsome as his brother.”

“As Bruno? Oh, auntie! What on earth are you thinking about? Dick not handsomer than Bruno! Why, they are not to be compared in the same breath; just look at Dick’s eyes!”

She pauses, as though waiting for Miss Maturin to perform this feat, which, as Mr. Bouverie at the present moment is five miles away, would be a difficult one. Miss Lorne’s next remark, however, would lead the unwary to believe that it has been performed.

“*Now* I hope you see how wrong you were,” she says, with a triumph in voice and eyes. “Why, Bruno isn’t fit to be named in the same day with him! Say you love Dick, Lallie, or I can’t be quite happy.”

"I think he is the most charming young man I know. He is the one I would have chosen for you," says poor Miss Maturin, driven to say this with a sinking heart. Then, the tension she has laid upon herself becoming too strong to be longer borne, she gives way a little.

"Go, Dolores, go!" she cries, faintly. "Go to your room." A passionate longing to be alone is consuming her. She speaks with a studied coldness that is but a remnant of the departing calm. Then, seeing her darling's grieved surprise at the unwonted severity of her tone, she once more nerves herself.

"Go, my beloved," she says, tenderly; "it is late. You have not dressed yourself, and dinner will soon be ready. We can discuss your great news later on."

Dolores silently obeys her; but when she gets to the door, almost as she touches the handle of it, some thought strikes her. She wavers, turns, and finally, running back again, flings her arms round Miss Maturin's neck.

"You know I love you, Lallie, don't you? You are not jealous of him? You are not lonely, or sorry, or—or *anything*, are you? That would break my heart. You feel quite *sure* of my love?"

"I do, my dearest child!" Her voice is low and broken with emotion.

"That is what I am to you—your child?"

"My own child! Truly I feel towards you more as a mother than an aunt."

"And I am sure," says Dolores, softly, "that, could my mother be given back to me now, I should never learn to love her as I love you."

When the door has closed behind Dolores, and she

is indeed gone—when the very last echo of her light footfall has ceased upon the polished boards beyond—a change comes over Miss Maturin.

Her hands fall to her sides, her face grows ashen. All in one pitifully-short moment she seems to have become an old woman. Despair shines dully within her eyes, and gives a desolate curve to her lips. Despair, too, is in her heart, and a terror that has long lain dormant—the fear of *discovery*!

To possess a secret—a sinless one so far as she herself and the creature she loves best on earth are concerned—has been Miss Maturin's doom—a cruel secret that has touched her, though from without—and burned into her and made her life for many years a burden almost too great to be borne.

Oh, the days and the long sleepless nights of anguish, and the years of bitter grief, filled to overflowing with a vain regret! There had been, too, wild moments in which passionate anger made havoc of her strength, and in which prevailed a longing for revenge, never to be fulfilled. And then had come calm and a strange new love exceeding all that had gone before it, born of the clinging arms and the innocent kisses of a little child who had wound herself round her heartstrings, and in process of years had grown into—Dolores! A child with sad eyes as a heritage, and a sensitive mouth, and a beauty exceeding that of most, and a spirit too great for her frail body. Pure, tender, loving, possessed of a heart that had learned “that more excellent way” and knew no guile, and a soul that truly thought no evil of any living thing, the child had grown into a girl touching upon the borders of womanhood.

As a little one, she had been gentle, and, for a child, wonderfully unselfish. As a girl, she is still more gentle, "believing all things" that will help her to reverence her kind and "hoping all things" for them. A little reserved in manner, perhaps, because of her persistent isolation in her childhood from those of her own age, but, nevertheless, loving, calm, and restful in manner, and with an unknown, because untried, but terrible capacity for endurance.

O most sweet spirit, what place is there for you in this cold sneering world?

Miss Maturin, with a little indescribable gesture, rouses herself from her lethargy, and in an angry fashion—as though impatient of fate and its sad decrees—paces up and down the long drawing-room. Memory, glad and bitter, troubles her; but, above all, the girl's beautiful face and still more beautiful soul saddens her. "Is there no grace? Is there no remedie?"

Dear Lord! how cruel seem Thy ways at times. And yet the unfailing records of countless ages teach us how sublime Thou art—how patient to Thy sinner, and how loving to Thy saint!

Miss Maturin, coming to a standstill by the lower window, gazes out absently upon the glories of the dying day. Are all her hopes to die as dies the sun, or is there still a promise for her in the thought that he will rise again to-morrow?

"Have pity upon me now, kind Heaven, in this my hour of need!" she whispers feverishly, bringing her palms together. "Yet it is for *her* I pray—for *her*, not for myself. Spare her! Let me be forgotten: but

have her ever in merciful remembrance! Let *me* suffer; but save her!"

She raises one hand to her head in a distracted fashion. The agony of her mind is reflected upon her face, which is white and drawn.

"If he must be told—if all is to be opened up afresh—what am I to say—to do? And she—ignorant, unknowing, it will kill her! Alas, alas, my lamb, my innocent one!" A sob checks her. "Why need he ever know?" she murmurs, her pale lips growing still more pallid. "Why not conceal it to the end, and trust to chance to befriend her? Who is there here to betray us? And yet if, at any time fate should throw in her path one who knew!——But they are so few who know! And once his wife, she would be safe—even should the truth come out. But how about her mind? Knowledge of that sort coming too late would destroy her—would break her loyal heart. No; she could not endure the shame to *him*! Oh," stretching out her arms to the darkening heavens, "how difficult is life! With what torn and bleeding feet the pure must tread the world! How can I help her—how?"

Her head sinks upon her breast, and for a little time she remains lost in thought; then she sighs wearily and sinks, as though overcome with bitter conclusions, into a lounging-chair.

"The truth—the truth is best!" she murmurs, brokenly. "He shall know the worst before he weds her. For her sake, I will run no risks. There shall be no after-discovery. To him I shall confide all; but she shall never know; I will not have her sweet life darkened! But when he hears her story, how will it

be with him then? Will his love be strong enough to bear the strain? If so, all will be well; if not——” Her voice sinks and a shadow coming from the gathering night falls athwart the room. “If it must be, so be it!” she says at last, faintly. “For her sake, I shall bring myself even to the betrayal of my dead. After all”——wearily——“old griefs are never buried; they come to us again and again when we believe ourselves free from them for ever. And yet I should have expected this. With her angel face some day it should be. Well, I shall speak when the right time comes; but not yet—not yet!”

A clear voice ringing through the hall; the refrain of a gay little French song echoing through the air; the door thrown suddenly open.

“Lallie—lazy Lallie! Here still?” cries a ringing voice. “Come—come this instant and get yourself ready for dinner! I shall be your maid to-night. A fig for Elizabeth and her old-maidish ways! I alone have the power to make you as lovely as Nature intended you should be. Come—unless you want cook to cast maledictions upon your head!”

“Go before me, darling,” says Miss Maturin, in a low voice.

CHAPTER X.

“Our souls in us were stirred and shifted
By doubts and dreams and foiled desires.”

“A little laughter
Is much more worth
Than thus to measure
The hour, the treasure,
The pain, the pleasure,
The death, the birth.”

SWINBURNE.

THE village choir has mercifully ceased from troubling the congregation for the time being. The ancient and much dilapidated organ has sunk into a fitful slumber, out of which it wakens every now and then to give way to a dismal scream, as one after another the windy sobs die out of the wheezy pipes. These irreverent screams, coming at uncertain periods, have a distinctly demoralizing effect upon the more youthful members of the choir, and reduce the school-children sitting demurely upon the forms below to such a low state of morality that it only requires one shriek more to bring their suppressed mirth to a head and cause a dangerous outbreak. Upon the elder members of the congregation, however, the result of these screams means simply depression.

The hot sun is rushing through the painted windows and casting bright patches of colour here and there—upon sober Quakerish bonnets that would scorn such finery if supplied by earth, but must needs bear

it when sent from heaven direct—upon poor bald heads and heads most daintily tressed—upon the rich and poor, the sinner and the saint alike. Upon Dolores, sitting with clasped hands and a rapt angelic face, it casts a brilliant crimson flush that lights up her lovely eyes to greater beauty, and throws rich stains upon her white gown, and is put to shame only by her soft, parted lips.

Sing, song, sing, song, goes the curate. His voice alone can be heard; the *words* of the second lesson are nowhere.

Poor man! may it be the lot of few of us to know such misery as his. His struggles, though small, are fierce! Years ago Nature (unkind parent) removed his teeth. A month ago he besought Art to replace his loss, and to-day is wildly fighting with a set of brand-new molars that come persistently in his way and derange his syllables, upset his periods, make conundrums of his simplest sentences, and threaten at every moment to rush incontinently down his throat and choke him! Bad as he was without his teeth in the years gone by, he is now *with* them infinitely worse!

As nobody is listening to him, however, all this makes little difference.

Lady Bouverie, in the square pew, is sitting therein in a scrupulously upright manner, with an expression upon her cold face that she fondly believes to be eminently pious, but which is only disagreeable. She is holding a Bible straight before her, and is gazing at it with a severity as forbidding as herself, and with an air meant to impress the congregation. She has mounted a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles upon her

hawk nose, and is altogether very terrible in appearance. No doubt the congregation of the farmer type *is* impressed, and believes her honest in her seemingly eager perusal of the Holy Writ before her. But in reality she is only calmly pondering upon certain worldly concerns very dear to her.

With a comfortable complacency she dwells upon the certainty of the growing attachment that exists between her elder son and the pretty heiress of Greylands. There has been no official announcement of an engagement, no taking into confidence of the mother by the son; but the former, for all that, is as cognizant of the love-affair as if she had been the chosen recipient of his raptures. Dolores to Lady Bouverie is what the fly is to the spider, a thing to be caught and devoured. Money is Lady Bouverie's god, and money is distinctly plentiful with Dolores. But one thing, perhaps, would rank above it in the elder woman's affections, and that would be birth; pride in her ancient lineage—older even than her husband's—runs through every fibre of her body. But of this too the little heiress can boast; of good people all through she comes, the Maturins being second to none in family, and counting as many generations as most.

That Dolores, pretty fly, should have so readily fallen into her web, or her arrangements, and that Dick should have followed suit, seems to his mother an unprecedented stroke of good luck. Nothing can exceed her amiability just at this time, or her excessive affability; she seems indeed to have cultivated a temper serene and placid, to which, most assuredly, she was not born. She lavishes upon Dolores—who

is a little bewildered by them—all the attentions and caresses of which she is capable. The attentions are simple, the caresses works of art.

Dolores's fortune, she has assured herself, is by many thousands greater than that of any other marriageable young lady in the county. Dolores, she admits, even to herself, is all that can be desired in manner and appearance. Her style is perfect, her taste unimpeachable. As a daughter-in-law, it will be quite possible to be absolutely proud of her. The girl's little, dainty, haughtily-set head can be seen by her as she turns her glance to the right, and looks at her from over the high oaken walls of the Bouverie pew that board her in on every side, and seem to add to her pomp by separating her so entirely from her fellow-creatures.

To-day the world is a week older than when Dolores and her lover stood by the rushing river and grew glad because of the fire of love that glowed within their eyes and burned so warmly in their hearts.

There had been a little change in Dick since that day, a change his mother had not been slow to mark—the glad abstraction in his face, his many reveries, the happy expectancy that betrayed itself each morning in his manner and spoke of the blessed certainty that soon he should be face to face again with *her*; the restlessness that grew upon him with the evening when hope of seeing her failed him, until long dull hours should have passed away.

“The god of love, ah, benedicite!
How mighty and how great a lord is he!”

One should be dense indeed not to know when Dick Bouverie was in love.

Warmer and warmer grows the day, drowsy and drowsier grows the congregation. Audrey Ponsonby, with a little imperious gesture, bids Sir Chicksy Chaucer open the window nearest her an inch or two more. It is all it will open, and no good comes to her from it, as winds are asleep to-day and breezes dead.

"You should bring a fan with you," whispers her father to her, absently, yet in a tone of loving concern. "A fan—eh?"

He is an elderly man, worn, white, with the orthodox stoop of a book-worm. His likeness to his sister, Lady Bouverie, is very striking; but an observer studying both would have said she ought to be the man, he the woman. In fact, "Dad," is as mild and gentle and simple at heart as she is quite the reverse.

"I must remember it next time," says Audrey, in a little soft whisper, turning upon him a smile that lights up all her supercilious face and softens it into great beauty. The fact that she possesses but one fan on earth, and that one only fit for evening use, she carefully hides from him. Where is he to find money for such frivolities as fans, when books, the food of his soul, are debarred him because of the emptiness of his purse?

In the pew opposite Audrey's, Mrs. Wemyss is leaning back gazing upon space. That Bruno Bouverie is gazing upon *her* is a fact of which she appears utterly unaware. Yet is she? There is something just a trifle too innocent about the droop of her pretty mouth.

The vicar's wife, Mrs. Dovedale, is sitting open-eyed, leaning a little forward, as though engrossed with the lesson, of which not one word is intelligible to her. Her friend Mrs. Drummond, being fat, forty, and unwieldy, is sighing heavily and inwardly anathematizing the too eager Sol. Miss Maturin, in an exquisite toilette, is reading her Bible diligently. Mr. Vyner, in his own pew, somewhat distant from the rest, is apparently sound asleep.

But what is this discordant shriek that rouses him once more to terrified life? It is the choir—it is the choir—my soul! Again it has arisen to its many feet. Again the bilious young organist plies his sorry instrument with such a will that the very rafters tremble with the gruesome sound. It ascends heavenwards—(If heaven receives it, it is very kind!)—it finds an echo in every corner. It drowns the thoughts of all present. It drowns, indeed, *everything*, except alas! the choir. At present they are “marching as to war,” and the shrillness of their battle cry is not to be surpassed! If earthly soldiers marched to Mr. Gladstone's wars with an ardour as vehement as is here displayed by spiritual ones, we need not wonder at the extreme brilliancy of the conquests that have been achieved!

And now once again silence, save for the melancholy mumble of the curate. The vicar is absent to-day, taking the duty of some sick brother, so that the entire service devolves upon the toothless one he left behind him.

More and more sleepy grow the people, the sun more vigorous; the whole church seems flushed with its yellow light! Naught can now be heard but the

response of the clerk as he helps the curate through the Commandments. Through all the heat and sunlight and general languor his voice comes lazily.

"And incline our hearts to skip this law!" He is an old man, and better might be expected of him; but this is undoubtedly what he says. His levity sits very badly upon him, and contrasts but ill with his hoar and reverend locks. Can he *mean* it?

And now comes the sermon. It may be a good one, it may be quite the other thing—who shall say? Nobody hears it. Nobody *wants* to hear it, which is very satisfactory, as they couldn't even if they would. The extreme heat has reduced most of those present to a state bordering upon insensibility. Even Dolores, with a swift inward sense of remorse, raises her delicately gloved hand to her lips to suppress a yawn. Two only of the whole assembly are thoroughly awake: Mrs. Dovedale, who, in a saintly attitude and a great big Rubens hat, and with her half-childish, half-malicious smile upon her lips, is outwardly intent upon the sermon that no man can hear; and Audrey Ponsonby, who, leaning back in her pew in an indolent fashion, with her great gloomy eyes wide open, is evidently lost in thought, of a character as scornful as it is sad with a vague regret.

"Lastly" has come; the curate has mopped his brow twice; the organ has wheezed afresh in anticipation of the last voluntary. Mr. Vyner has reached that point in his slumbers when a snore may confidently be expected, when providentially the "Amen" is spoken, and all is at an end.

"What a delicious day; but just a little too much of it!" says Mrs. Wemyss, as every one crowds into

the porch outside with an alacrity that betrays their joyfulness at their escape. "I do hope you will all brave the heat, and come and rouse me up this afternoon, or I shall be bored to death. Sunday afternoons are always so oppressive."

She smiles—nay, beams on every one; she returns Bruno's warm hand-clasp with a pressure that leaves nothing to be desired. She is perfectly delightful even to Lady Bouverie, who is not quite as fond of her as she might be.

Yes; most of those she addresses will be charmed to drop into her during the afternoon. It is her usual day of reception, and is generally well attended. Even Mrs. Drummond, who goes in for the heavier type of religion and always calls Sunday "The Sabbath" in big letters, and makes that holiest of days a perfect curse and a cause of life-long regret to her household, so far overcomes her prejudices as to go to Mrs. Wemyss's every Sunday between the services. But then Mrs. Wemyss is an "honourable," and that, according to Mrs. Drummond's lights, makes *such* a difference!

Mrs. Dovedale too is always to be seen there on Sunday afternoons, with her babyish bonnet or her big hat as the case may be, and her little curious smile, that means nothing or a great deal. So is every one else. After all, if you take notice of the fact, you will find that Sunday afternoon is the dull spot in one's weekly routine that all the world would scamp if they could. Chatting it away at Mrs. Wemyss's is as good a way of scamping it as most.

"So quite too good of you all to come," says Mrs. Wemyss, rising from her garden chair about two hours

later to greet Mrs. Drummond, and comprehending in her speech those who have already come. She alters her style to suit her guests at times, and therefore occasionally makes rather funny little speeches; but this at least may well be said of her, that whatever she may choose to say at the moment always becomes her. She glances in a quick flickering fashion at Bruno Bouverie as she thus greets Mrs. Drummond, and there is something about the expression of her eyes suggestive of the idea that she could laugh were she to find herself suddenly alone. "An hour ago," she goes on, smiling, and clicking her huge black fan with as good a grace as any Spanish señora, "I feared no one would have the charity to break in upon my monotony, and *then* I felt suicidal."

At this Mrs. Drummond regards it as her direct duty to enter a faint protest.

"But you had your books surely," she says, with a meandering smile, "your *good* books—your De Quincy that I lent you, your Hall, your A'Beckett?"

"I had," responds Mrs. Wemyss, promptly. "I had them all in a row. I tried them every one in turn, and that I am convinced is why I felt so specially murderous this afternoon! Ah, Miss Maturin, this *is* a pleasure; and you too, dear Dolores! And"—with a little mischievous smile—"of course *you*, Mr. Bouverie." Her manner is altogether different now, and full of a tender gladness as she greets these last comers.

"It takes but a simple intellect to see how it is with Dick," says Bruno, presently, when his hostess is once more seated in her garden chair—they are all out of doors on this most blessed afternoon, and he is, as usual, lounging at her feet.

"Why, yes! He seems in excellent health," replies she, indifferently.

"I'm not talking about his health," says Bruno, somewhat indignantly. "What I mean is that he's quite gone in that quarter."

He nods lightly to where Dolores is standing, the centre of a small group.

"Gone?" repeats Mrs. Wemyss, innocently. "Dear me, no, he isn't over there at all; he is standing quite close to Audrey, on *this* side. See?"

"How you amuse yourself!" says Bruno, with a slight shrug and an amused glance. "What I want you to hear me say, then, is, that Dick is in love."

"Ah!" exclaims Mrs. Wemyss, lifting her brows. "You should break your news more gently. In love? With whom?"

"Miss Lorne, if you will have me put it into words. And she, as it seems to me, is quite as *empresée* about him. There is nothing to choose between them; she is quite as much in it as he is. Don't you think they will make a charming pair?"

"Ah! Now who would have believed them so silly?" murmurs Mrs. Wemyss, in an accent replete with heartfelt regret.

"Eh?" says Bruno, who up to this had been almost enthusiastic in his speech. He raises himself upon his elbow and gazes at her earnestly.

"So foolish of them!" exclaims Mrs. Wemyss, biting her red lip with considerable force. "But it was to be expected. It is, of course, the way they *would* go. Nobody has a grain of sense now-a-days except myself and you. There—that's polite of me, if you like. Have some strawberries?"

"I don't understand you," says Bruno, stiffly, refusing to be mollified even by the sweet smile she sends straight into his eyes. "Who is foolish, and why?"

"Your brother and that lovely child. Why you have just been telling me all about it!" returns she, with an assumption of reproach.

"I said nothing of folly, certainly; I only said they loved each other."

"*Bien*, and how could you possibly have said it more distinctly?" A little rippling laugh breaks from her as she presses a strawberry into a mouth that is scarcely less red than it.

"Love, then, you deem folly?" asks the young man, half angrily.

"The very height of it, don't"—with a soft coquettish glance—"don't *you*?"

"No, I don't," exclaims Bruno, indignantly, after which he gathers himself up from her feet and saunters moodily away in the direction of nobody. This way carries him into the gardens beyond; but it doesn't keep him there. It just gives him time to concentrate within his brain the fact that the most exquisite flowers in Christendom are altogether inferior to the society of Mrs. Wemyss. After the imbibing of which knowledge, like a very sensible young man, he returns once more to civilized life. Once more, too, he approaches Mrs. Wemyss with a face wreathed in smiles, and sinks into his old seat besides her.

"The garden is pretty, isn't it?" says she, with light enthusiasm. "I knew you would like it. I don't wonder you stayed there so long!" It is precisely five minutes and a half since he left her.

"Was I cross?" whispers Bruno, contritely. "I'm a bear, I know, because you have so often told me so. But, you see, you upset all one's preconceived ideas so utterly that you upset one's temper too. I had been for so long dwelling upon the thought that there really was something out of the common sweet about Dick's love for Dolores that, when you crushed the sweetness, I was startled—no more."

Mrs. Wemyss changes colour for an instant then she is herself again.

"Ah! And so that was it?" she says, gaily, with a quick glance at him from under her rather roguish lids.

"Every bit of it."

"What a temper you must have, then, to get into such a rage over another man's business. Now, if I had said anything that touched *yourself* at any point, or concerned you in any way——"

"I should not of course have lost my temper," finishes Bruno, returning her gaze steadily for a full minute—only a minute, however. Then his eyes go down before hers. He sighs. "You do with me what you will," he says, in a low tone, reluctantly, and forthwith returns to his allegiance and the hem of her gown.

The word "garden," however, has fallen upon fertile soil. It has, in fact, dropped upon Miss Drummond, who, like the cockles, is for ever "all alive, O!" She has made up the thing she is pleased to call her mind, to marry either Mr. Vyner or Sir Chicksy Chaucer, but rather leans towards the latter as being easier game and having a title to bestow. "*Lady Chaucer!*" how unique! how uncommon! how *antique!*

She now turns towards the youthful baronet, who is as far gone in a dream about the back of Miss Ponsonby's little Grecian head as his intellect will permit.

"Gardens!" she says, ecstatically. "I do so love flowers. Don't you, Sir Chicksy?"

"Eh?" says Sir Chicksy, rousing himself with considerable difficulty.

"Flowers, you know," continues Miss Drummond, with a beaming smile that spreads her mouth—to which Nature has already been more than generous—to a positively alarming width. "I hear dear Mrs. Wemyss's gardens are exceptionally fine. Will you"—almost fondly—"take me to see them?"

"He is done, by Jove!" whispers Mr. Vyner to Bruno at this moment, with a most unholy joy. But he isn't!

"I'd be awfully delighted to show 'em to you," says the baronet, with an unmistakably kindly air; "but, fact is, I must stay near Miss Ponsonby, you know, to fan her in case she should feel too warm. Hot day, you see, and she can't bear heat. Not so strong as you or me, you see! eh!" This in a confidential aside that plainly maddens Miss Drummond.

"Are you Miss Ponsonby's medical adviser?" she asks, with what she fatuously believes to be seething sarcasm: "If so, I congratulate her! But as I am not aware that I ever engaged you as family practitioner to the Drummonds, I am quite at a loss to understand how you have estimated Miss Ponsonby's strength (which to *me* seems almost masculine) to be so much less than mine." Here follows a most disastrous attempt at a genial outburst of merriment.

Sir Chicksy appearing positively dumb-stricken by

this awful assumption of pleasantry, stares at her with an eye-glass and an open mouth, but says nothing.

"To the rescue!" whispers Mrs. Wemyss, good-naturedly, who has been an admiring witness of this one-handed skirmish.

"Miss Drummond, do you remember Mrs. White?" she asks, leaning forward, so as to compel Miss Drummond's attention. "Old lady who took the cottage last November, and had more teeth than nature ever provided?"

"I remember," says Miss Drummond, slowly, *very* slowly removing her baleful glance from the terrified baronet.

"She married more people than the Archbishop of Canterbury! She was a most determined old match-maker. She married two of my best friends to the wrong people when my back was turned, so I'm not likely to forgive her," rattles on Mrs. Wemyss in the cause of peace.

"I'd like to see the person who could marry *me* against my will," declares Miss Drummond, with subdued animosity born of the late encounter with the luckless Chaucer.

"So should I," says Mr. Vyner, in a mild aside to Miss Ponsonby. "That person is not of earthly mould! 'Cause why! I defy any one to produce the man she'd marry '*against* her will.' 'Sing hey! for Hymen!' is her motto."

"High men, or low men—it is all the same to her," says Sir Chicksy, gloomily, regarding his late assailant with a wrathful brow. (The small classical allusion has been hardly grasped by him.) "I never saw such a cross girl!" says he.

"Such an odd little trick, too, as she had of covering up all her furniture in brown holland," goes on Mrs. Wemyss, rapidly, pressing the absent Mrs. White forcibly into the service with a view to restoring equanimity all round. "Chairs, lounges, priedieus, *all* were enveloped in brown bags. The monotony of it made the eye water. It was meant to preserve the colours beneath, she said."

"Perhaps there were no colours beneath," suggests Bruno. "What a delicate swindle! What an excellent taking-in of all one's neighbours! When I marry (which is sure to be soon) I shall economize in that way. I shall shroud my home in cleanly linen, and swear to the non-existent velvets and satins beneath."

"And I shall come to see you armed with a pen-knife with which to expose the fraud," says Mrs. Wemyss.

"Oh, no; *you* won't come at all! You'll be there—a partner in the fraud," returns Bruno, daringly, but so as to be heard by her alone.

"For an old woman, did you ever meet any one so mad on yachting," laughs Vyner, "as that Mrs. White you speak of? She is never happy unless when on board her schooner."

"It is on board that schooner she consummates half her villanies," says Mrs. Wemyss. "She used to say there was no place like a yacht for getting a man to propose—beats a country-house all to nothing."

"*You* know her!" remarks Bruno. "Every autumn she inveigles an eldest son into joining her in her tour to the Mediterranean or the South Seas, or the Antipodes, or somewhere. Then she smuggles in a penniless beauty, and sails away with 'em both, and

refuses to put into port anywhere until the young man comes to the scratch. You can't get away from a girl, you see, on board a boat, so the man hasn't a chance unless he prefers drowning to matrimony. I hear the girl's mother pays all the expenses of the tour if the match comes off. Very fair bargain; saves Mrs. White a lot, you see, and gives her her autumn trip for nothing! Cheap arrangement, eh?"

"I don't believe in match-making," says Miss Maturin, suddenly. "It is a mistaken calling, and results in little good. I don't believe any one ever made a good match, as they call it."

"Oh, there you are wrong," interposes Mr. Vyner, mildly. "Surely you have not forgotten Bryant and May!"

"Tut!" says Miss Maturin; but she laughs unrestrainedly with that pretty low laugh of hers, that even up to this has kept its youth; and somehow the sound of her mirth puts venom to flight more than all the enforced conversation that could be.

Miss Drummond, as though it is not congenial to her, rises and wanders away to where the children are playing with the king-cups and the daisies—little mites, too young to know what life means, and happier in their ignorance than they will ever be again. There are two of "Dad's" *very* young boys among them, and a little boy from the parsonage, and the doctor's fairy of a daughter.

"Chaucer," says Mr. Vyner, "why aren't you upon your bended knees? Think of the explosion from which Mrs. Wemyss saved you. There was death in Miss Drummond's eye when first we caught her glance."

"And I didn't do a bit to her!" exclaims Sir Chicksy, eagerly. "Not a bit, give you my honour! Sort of told her I couldn't go to the garden with her—nothing more. Thereupon she lost her temper awfully—quite *awfully*, I assure you."

"No, she didn't," says Vyner, sadly. "That's the worst of it. If she only *would* lose it and never find it again the world would be the sweeter for her loss. Mrs. Wemyss, is a cigarette a crime?"

"Not here"—smiling. "For myself, I like the perfume of tobacco."

"Hah—smoke!" cries Mrs. Drummond, who has drawn near. "But don't mind me, my dear"—to her hostess. "Of course young men will be young men; and I daresay there are worse things than a pipe."

"A few," says Bruno. "Not that I see a pipe anywhere."

"Look at my Georgina," says Mrs. Drummond, in a perfect overflow of motherly love—"always happiest when with the little ones! Shows such a thorough sweetness of disposition, such a hankering after that divine simplicity that belongs alone to childhood! But, in truth, my Georgina is at heart but a child herself."

Silence follows upon this maternal rhapsody, a silence that is but the veil to cloak the reprehensible tendency towards laughter that is consuming all her hearers.

"What are you thinking of, Anthony?" asks Mrs. Wemyss, suddenly, to whom Mr. Vyner is an old friend. "You are silent. Tell us of your thoughts."

She says this merely to destroy the fear that the real nature of her own silence may be guessed.

"They were deep," says Mr. Vyner, solemnly. "They had much to do with a big bee booming busily by. Forgive the alliteration."

"I love alliteration," declares Mrs. Wemyss, calmly, whilst the others smile; "don't you?"—to Mrs. Drummond.

"A—a *what*, my dear?" asks Mrs. Drummond vacantly, which upsets all decorum. There is one terrible moment, during which Mrs. Wemyss feels her afternoon is going to be a failure, and that presently Mrs. Drummond will be seen retiring from their midst offended past all hope. Then Bruno, seeing the agony in her eye, comes to the rescue, and makes some little passing remark at which they may laugh if they will, and at which they do, immoderately, to Mrs. Drummond's undisguised amazement.

"How quiet you are, Dolores!" says Mrs. Wemyss, caressingly, glancing at Miss Lorne as she lies back a little languidly in her wicker chair, a thoughtful, happy smile upon her lips. She has, indeed, been lost in an unconscious silence full of a nameless charm; but now, hearing herself thus called back into life, she learns for the first time that she *is* silent, and the sweetness of her musings comes to an end. She colours faintly, and casts a half-shy glance at Bouverie, who is leaning over her chair.

"I was day-dreaming," she answers, nervously. "What a sunset it is, with its crimson glows and the orange tinge of the clouds! What a lovely neighbourhood to live in!"

"Like Auburn, it is 'the loveliest village of the plain,'" says Vyner; and it is remarkable that there is no trace of cynicism in his tone as he speaks to her.

"Yes, yes, indeed," she says, as though very pleased, and smiles upon him. Her large eyes are full of sweet enthusiasm, her pretty hair, shining like threads of gold, is blown hither and thither by the soft summer wind. She looks like some soft spirit from another world blown into ours.

"How beautiful she is!" exclaims Audrey, suddenly, looking impulsively at Vyner.

"Very beautiful."

"What a pure little face! She is the dearest little baby of a thing—quite the angel type. I am sure, if she lived for a thousand years, the breath of scandal could not come nigh her."

"That is a remark that should be applicable to all women, shouldn't it? To you, as well as to her?" says Vyner, lazily; but something in his tone jars upon her.

"Some people get things said of them, even though they may not deserve it a bit more than those others of the angelic type," she says, quickly. "It is unfair; but it is so all the same."

"By 'some people' meaning yourself?" asks he, flicking off the ash of his cigarette.

"Never mind me," returns she, icily. "We were talking of Miss Lorne."

"Still, I do mind you," says Vyner. "The more so in that you are—— By-the-by, do you know you are looking very well to-day?"

"Does that mean I was looking very ugly yesterday?"

"I don't think so, because I didn't happen to see you yesterday. But to return, then, to Miss Lorne. So she interests you?"

"No. Nobody does that. I admire her; that is all. I don't find I ever have much to say to her; but, as I told you before, she looks like an angel, and it is well to catch a glimpse now of what I may never see hereafter."

"Ah, you find her slow?" suggests Vyner, an almost imperceptible smile widening his lips.

"I certainly don't find her fast," replies she, with a quick frown. Then she rises to her feet. "I never talk to you," she cries, with sudden repulsion, "that I don't feel the full hideousness of my life!"

She stares down at him with angry, glowing eyes; but he seems impervious to her wrath.

"Don't go yet," he says, as evenly and in as friendly a tone as if those flashing eyes above him had been soft as violets. "I've got no one to talk to but you. Don't forsake me!"

There is no unwonted eagerness in the manner of his request, and she still stands looking down upon him as he tranquilly smokes his cigarette, her heart throbbing with a most unpleasant force.

"I wanted to ask you about the old boy," begins Mr. Vyner. Then he stops short, and a flush overspreads his countenance. "I *beg* your pardon," he says, really horror-stricken at his mistake. "I meant your father—Dad!"

"Call him that first name, if you will. I *like* it," says Miss Ponsonby, eagerly. All her *hauteur* has vanished, and a sudden, warm, lovely smile brightens her cold haughty face into a vivid beauty. "It makes me feel he is still *young*; that there is no fear I shall ever lose him," she says, tenderly.

For a moment Vyner makes her no reply. He is watching the curious soft light within her eyes, and perhaps marvelling at it; but, even as he watches it, the fresh light fades, and the first look of resentment returns.

"You shall speak to me of Dad another time; I am not in the humour now," she murmurs coldly, and moves away from him to where Dolores is sitting calm and sweet.

Meantime Mrs. Drummond is talking confidentially to her friend (?) Mrs. Dovedale on a matter that has been much troubling her of late—namely, the questionable propriety of her having purposely omitted to send Audrey a card for her ball that is to take place to-morrow evening.

"Of course, now the duchess has taken her into such high favour, it makes things awkward," she says to Mrs. Dovedale, with quite a tremor in her voice. "I wish, after all, I *had* invited her, though her aunt Lady Bouverie certainly detests her. Do you think, dear, that, if I were to ask her now, even at this last moment—giving a proper excuse of course—that she would come? Give me your candid opinion now, my love, because, to confess the truth to you, I am uneasy about it. Not that I like the girl; only——"

"No, no; she is too attractive to be liked," murmurs little Mrs. Dovedale, in her childish treble. "Yes, ask her. If you do, you can at least always say she refused, you know, and that it was not jealousy that induced you to exclude her."

"Jealousy! I am not jealous of her," exclaims Mrs. Drummond, reddening uncomfortably.

"No? I thought perhaps Georgina—— But of course—— Well, ask her, I say. Her refusal can do you no harm."

"But *will* she refuse?" says Mrs. Drummond, indignantly. "I don't believe it. She will be only too glad to escape the monotony of her life for even one night. She is—er—er—very poor, you know; and people like that should not give themselves airs."

Mrs. Dovedale laughs prettily.

"But rich people may; is that it?" she asks. "Long ago we—that is, my people—used to think that only those who had grandfathers—generations—tiresomely long genealogies, you know—could dare to hold up their heads. Now it is all different—all the other way round, isn't it?" She laughs again. "But about Miss Ponsonby?" she goes on. "Why, do ask her; it will do her no harm, you see, and you—no good! How pretty she looks to-day—and how completely she has enslaved Sir Chicksy!"

"She is artful in the extreme; but I suppose I had better ask her," says Mrs. Drummond, reluctantly, moving away to where Audrey is sitting, to Mrs. Dovedale's discomfiture, who, for some reason or reasons unknown, would gladly have left Miss Ponsonby without even this late invitation.

"Dear Miss Ponsonby," says Mrs. Drummond, fluttering up to Audrey with a simpering smile upon her inexpressive countenance, and what, in a wild flight of fancy, she believes to be a genial manner, "so glad to find you alone for a moment!"

She hovers round her for a minute with all sails spread, and then sinks into the seat beside her.

"I am generally alone," returns Audrey, coldly; then, "Do you think you could manage to keep a little more to the left? Ah, thanks! Your umbrella is of such an abnormal size,—and I do so hate having my bonnet disarranged."

"I have much wanted a word with you," says Mrs. Drummond, effusively. "That absurd mistake about your invitation for to-morrow night—our dance, you know. I can't think how it occurred."

"No?" Audrey turns two clear cold eyes upon her. "But where was the mistake?"

"Why, not sending you a card, my dear. It was quite an oversight—*quite!* May I hope you will forgive it, and give us the pleasure of your company all the same?"

"You are really too good!" says Miss Ponsonby, slowly, after a distressingly long pause that brings Mrs. Drummond's face to the colour of a peony. "And pray do not distress yourself about the mistake—there was none! *Had* you sent me that card you speak of, it would have been a *bêtise* indeed; but, as it is—— *Would* you try to keep your parasol a little more that way?—As it is, I find it quite impossible to accept your kind invitation."

"But, my dear Miss Ponsonby——"

"I beg you will not give me the trouble of refusing you twice," interrupts Audrey, haughtily, turning from her with the gesture of an offended queen, and with all the air of one who is undoubtedly speaking to some one of very inferior quality.

Mrs. Drummond, more crushed than she cares to admit, rises precipitately, and carries herself and her parasol to a distant part of the grounds. Mr. Vyner,

who has watched the whole manœuvre from afar, slips into her vacant chair, and laughs aloud.

"I hope you weren't too severe," he says. "What could she have said, poor fat soul, to bring down those wrathful glances on her head?"

"The insolence of her!" breathes Miss Ponsonby, between her teeth.

"Yes? She was inviting you to-day to her ball to-morrow night—eh?"

"You seem to know everything. Perhaps, too, you know my answer?"

"I can guess it: 'No.'"

"For once you are right."

"For twice, you mean. Though, I must confess, Mrs. Dovedale helped me to my first guess. You won't go?"

"No, I have no desire to enter her aristocratic circle. I can actually—so poor is my spirit—manage to live outside it."

"Little girls shouldn't be sarcastic."

"However, there is one thing," says Audrey, turning to him with a bitter smile; "my going or staying will cause no one pain or pleasure. To me all the world is indifferent. I have no friends; therefore there is a virtue in my unpopularity. My absence to-morrow night will make no one unhappy."

"True! There is good to be found in everything," replies he sententiously.

Perhaps she had expected a different answer from so old a friend. At all events, for an instant his words throw a deeper shadow on her face. *Only* for an instant; then it clears, and she laughs with a sudden sense of amusement.

"Why, look you," she says, "you are the only one that does me real good! From you one gets the truth, however unpalatable; you are a tonic in yourself. I should always have you near me to say sharp things to me, to help me keep my balance, and not lose my head over the world's injustice. There are times, you see, when I am discontented, peevish, and 'sick with hating the sweet sun.'"

"Whose son?" asks Mr. Vyner, calm judicial inquiry in his eye. He even leans anxiously towards her, as though athirst for information. His frivolity enrages her.

"There, *go!*" she exclaims, in a low tone full of passionate anger.

It is a tone he dares not disobey. He saunters slowly away from her, and is soon lost amidst a group at the other side of the lawn.

"How I hate him!" says Audrey, very softly, letting one hand grow clinched beneath the folds of her gown, where no one can see it, and biting her pale lips to bring them back their colour.

A few drops of rain begin to fall placidly. First in ones, and then in twos and threes they come, until the pattering drops grow too rapid for counting.

"Dolores, where is your shawl? You are not sufficiently covered," cries Miss Maturin, anxiously, who seems never for one moment to forget the welfare of her darling.

"Yes—better come in-doors," says Bouverie, bending tenderly over Miss Lorne.

"Let us all go and sit on the veranda," suggests Mrs. Wemyss, pleasantly, "until this summer shower be over-past. Come, Miss Maturin, we will lead the

way, and perhaps the servants will be good-natured enough to give us our tea at last. Ah, Sir Chicksy! useful always! I'm sure I don't see how we could ever get on without you!"

The youthful baronet bestows upon her a grateful glance, and continues his occupation of gathering up all the loose wraps forgotten by eager owners rushing towards the welcome shelter of the veranda. Now, reaching that happy goal himself, he marches up and down among the other guests with his hands clasped beneath his coat-tails. This is a favourite attitude of his, that makes him look like nothing in the world so much as a superannuated jackdaw. Every one is having tea and cake, or wine and fruit, or something, and Sir Chicksy is hopping about among them in great contentment of spirit. For is not she here—his queen, his "ladye?" By such high-sounding titles does he designate in his own mind his scornful love—Miss Ponsonby.

"Oh, I say," he calls out suddenly to no one in particular, "look here! Tell you the funniest thing I saw yesterday—man in the street, you know!"

Here he pauses somewhat vaguely, whereupon everybody stares at him. Surprise, largely mingled with curiosity, is general. Where does the joke come in? That is what they all want to know, but yet fail to see, except indeed Mr. Vyner, who appears radiant with enthusiastic sympathy and full of understanding.

"By Jove, that *was* funny!" he says. "What luck for you! Think he'll be there again?"

"He may; I'm not sure. Wait a bit," says Sir Chicksy, absently.

Now everybody is speechless with amazement. Dolores looks concerned, Miss Ponsonby a little shade deeper in colour than she was a moment since. Have the poor little man's brains failed him at last?

Mrs. Wemyss and Bruno are fast approaching that last fatal stage when mirth will have its way, when all at once Sir Chicksy's face shows signs of intellect, and the fire of a knowledge just grasped lights within his beaming eye.

"I have it," he cries, triumphantly, "I've got it! I knew there was a word for it somewhere, but it slipped me. He was an acrobat! my fellow in the street was an acrobat, and I never saw a better. He chewed up everything he could lay his hands on, from brass buttons to cabbages!"

"And why?" asks Mr. Vyner, mournfully. "Was he so very hungry, then, poor soul?"

"Not at all, not at all," returns Sir Chicksy, in perfect good faith, feeling immensely pleased at the interest he has so evidently created in the breast of Anthony Vyner. "It was only his tricks, you know."

"Naughty old man!" says Mrs. Wemyss, laughing gaily. "At his age to be so frivolous! But perhaps he wasn't so old, after all. Was he young and tender, Sir Chicksy? Were his features mild and mellow?"

"They were rather marked," confesses Sir Chicksy, with some reluctance. "Especially his cheeks and his brow; he'd had small-pox, I am afraid. And, as for his nose, why, it was tremendous!"

"'Give me a man with a nose,' said the Duke of Wellington," puts in Bruno, with encouragement in voice and eye.

"Well, I don't suppose he would have preferred a man without one," says Mrs. Wemyss, saucily which rather destroys the effect of Bruno's speech. "That's all nonsense, you know. Well, Sir Chicksy, and what did your man do?"

"Everything!" declares Sir Chicksy, with growing excitement; "but last thing beat all. He stood on his head and drank a glass of beer without spilling a drop! He did, I give you my word."

"What intelligence, what talent!" breathes rather than speaks Mr. Vyner.

"I thought he'd have choked," goes on Sir Chicksy, eagerly. "But he didn't; never even got black in the face. Awfully funny now, wasn't it?"

"Never heard of anything so comic in all my life," says Vyner. "Oh, how I wish I could drink a glass of beer standing on my head before an admiring audience—this audience, for example"—with a loving smile at Miss Drummond, who goes down before it.

"So should I," says Sir Chicksy. "I'd give anything to be an acrobat."

"Especially on a sunny June day," puts in Bruno, dryly, "with the thermometer ninety in the shade, and the dust on the roadway two inches deep."

"That would only make it softer for one's poor head," persists Vyner, with a calmly argumentative air.

"But, dear Sir Chicksy, surely you would not care to go about posing in the middle of muddy roads?" cooes Mrs. Dovedale. "Think how your friends would resent it!"

"Of course, I couldn't do it in public," acknowledges Sir Chicksy, regretfully; "but in a drawing-

room now—h'm?—after dinner—with the curtains drawn—eh?—just to amuse one's friends—d'ye see?—to cause a—a little change—eh? Some fellows can be amusing all round," says Sir Chicksy, with a rueful air, "and some fellows can't, you know. But I think *any* fellow who could stand on his head without kicking, and drink his beer so, without spilling a drop, might be considered—er—doing something—er—agreeable—eh?"

At this all the women break into a peal of irresistible laughter.

"Oh, Sir Chicksy!" cries Mrs. Wemyss, at last. "Why need you *try* to be amusing? You needn't. No acrobat that ever saw the light could make himself as amusing as you are now."

"No, but really though," goes on the baronet, earnestly, fumbling vainly with his eye-glass, which he has foolishly brought into prominence, and now does not know how to get rid of. "'Twas very clever—the man's performance I mean,—extraordinary clever, I assure you. You'd have been delighted with it."

"I feel that," says Mrs. Wemyss.

"Why can't we all go in a body and learn how to do it?" asks Bruno. "Where is your conjurer, Sir Chicksy? If we could only catch him, we might buy from him his ware."

"I don't know where he is," says Sir Chicksy. "He went down the street and away, looking very desolate, I thought. Not a soul was with him, and he limped a little as though worn out. There had been fifty or more gaping at him when he had been—er—

er—acrobating you know; but they vanished into thin air when his juggling had come to an end. The first fellow he held out his old battered hat to was on the edge of the crowd, and he stuck his hand in his breeches pocket, and stared and stammered and gave—*nothing!* And I give you my word, whilst the acrobat waited on *him*—it took only one minute—all the other forty-nine disappeared. In the twinkling of an eye, as it were, they were gone; I couldn't see where, unless the earth had opened to swallow 'em up."

"Pity it didn't," says Miss Ponsonby, with a little curious indrawing of her lips.

"I don't really believe they gave him one farthing."

"Forty thieves," says Miss Maturin, "to take his goods and give him no payment!"

"I watched the whole scene from the window of Benson's seed-shop," goes on Sir Chicksy, "and I thought to myself how forlorn he looked trudging lamely down the deserted village street."

"You shouldn't have left him—that way, I mean," says Audrey, suddenly, regarding him with a slight frown. "You too enjoyed his performance, though from the secrecy of a window."

"I had to leave him," says Sir Chicksy, hastily, the severity of his goddess's tone causing him deep tribulation. "I had to get you your books, you know, and there was that message for Mr. Ponsonby besides. I was uncommon sorry to see him go away like that—he looked so poverty-stricken, and so horribly like—er—consumption, you know."

"Oh, poor, poor man!" murmurs Dolores, softly, her eyes filling with tears. All at once it seems to her that she can see the sweet drowsy June afternoon, the tiny hot deserted street, the drooping dusty trees, and, at the end of it all, the limping figure of the poor acrobat creeping wearily along, homeless, friendless, alone! Dear Heaven, how sad to feel like that—*alone!* Bouverie, unseen by the others, lays his hand with a comforting touch upon the back of her head, and smooths, with loving fingers, her soft silken rings of hair.

"All the more reason why you should have done something for him!" says Audrey, coldly, still transfixing the agonized baronet with a contemptuous glance.

"To help him to another living?" asks Sir Chicksy, still quite at sea as to her meaning. "He wouldn't like that, you know—he'd hate it. He is accustomed to the life he now leads, and would object to another. An acrobat is an acrobat, you know." This is an undeniable fact, so nobody seeks to upset it.

"Hear, hear," says Mr. Vyner, with open approbation.

"And you can't change a man's mode of life all in a moment," goes on Sir Chicksy, earnestly. "You can't make a tinker into an archbishop in five minutes, can you now?"

This is another incontrovertible fact, and no one tries to dispute it either.

"He is getting so deep," says Mr. Vyner to his next neighbour, "that, if some one doesn't give him a helping hand soon, he'll drown."

"You might have shown him some sympathy," persists Audrey, still addressing Sir Chicksy.

"I did. I don't think I ever felt more sorry for any one," declares Sir Chicksy, almost in tears.

"What I mean is," exclaims Audrey, losing her patience and therefore coming bluntly to her real meaning, "that, instead of feeling so much, you might have given him some money."

"Why, of course I gave him money!" returns Sir Chicksy, indignantly. "Good gracious! He was just the sort one couldn't look at without giving him money. I gave him five shillings." He blushes over this confession. At the time of giving, five shillings had seemed quite enough; now he feels a sovereign would have been quite too altogether shabby.

"Then why didn't you say so?" demands Audrey, naturally much incensed, yet pleased too that her suspicions were unfounded.

"I didn't know that was what you wanted me to say," replies he, ingenuously. "I thought you would have known!"

At this everybody smiles, and Mr. Vyner breaking off a little rose-bud from the wall near him, throws it into Audrey's lap.

"It took time, didn't it?" he says carelessly, but with a touch of suppressed amusement in his eyes.

"Even if so, it was worth waiting for," returns she, quickly. Then—not angrily, not even unsmilingly, yet with a cold decision—she throws the rose-bud back to him. Mr. Vyner, catching it, sits down and placidly commences to devour it leaf by leaf. Plainly he derives from its pink heart much and varied

musings, as he speaks no word to any one until its last petal is consumed.

"Somebody is coming," says Mrs. Wemyss, suddenly; "I feel it. Somebody is in the drawing-room. Look, one of you, and say who it is."

Bruno, lifting the lace curtain of the open window near him, glances carelessly into the drawing-room. Not so careless, however, is his glance as he once more faces his friends.

"My Mother!" says he, in capital letters; and a universal rout is the result. Consternation sits on every face; every one at once finds it is very late, and quite time to bid their hostess adieu. Mr. Vyner alone rises gracefully to the occasion and his feet. He welcomes Lady Bouverie among them with a subdued effusiveness that creates admiration in the breast of Mrs. Wemyss, and brings the word "hypocrite!" to Audrey's scornful lips.

"No. Would you really call me that?" asks he, with grieved surprise, overhearing her. "Odd, if true, because in reality I am the most straightforward person alive! But these little complications of character—— Going now? Well, I shall walk home with you then, and explain to you my hypocritical honesty and the honesty of my hypocrisy as we go."

"Sir Chicksy can take care of me," says Audrey, icily.

"And so can I," Mr. Vyner assures her, cheerfully. "Two escorts are better than one. Can you deny that? And, besides, Sir Chicksy—though quite the most intelligent and charming person I know—might, in one of his erudite reveries, lose his way and lead you into

the next county, and then what should I—I mean what would ‘Dad’ do?”

He laughs. She turns impatiently aside; but the little soft light that always creeps into her eyes when “Dad’s” name is mentioned comes there now; and, without making any further objection, she beckons to Sir Chicksy, and bidding Mrs. Wemyss good-by goes down the avenue escorted by the two young men.

CHAPTER XI.

“Fair as a rose is on earth, as a rose under water in prison.”

“We are not sure of sorrow,
And joy was never sure.”

SWINBURNE.

“SOMETIME too hot the eye of heaven shines,” but not to-day. There is a chastened measure in its strength, a little tremulous subduing of its mighty power this afternoon that shows itself in paler sunbeams and in the sighing of the dainty winds that linger in lawn and woodway. Up from the sea they come, scented with salted spray, laying cool touches upon all they pass; the great calm of the day is rendered even calmer by them, so gentle are they; the constant roar of the waves is hushed to silence. Peace lies on land and water.

“The winds, with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kist,
Whispering new joys to the mild ocean,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave.”

The world is a day older; the sun is mounted high in his blue kingdom; the roses are a few hours nearer their death—happy death, coming with glow of yellow warmth, and rushing of sultry winds!

With half a mind to go to the beach, Dolores left

her home an hour ago; but a fond remembrance of the river checked her desire for the more noble sea, and, turning aside, she had sought the sylvan shade of trees and the quaint, musical murmur of the rippling water, gliding over rugged stone, and past soft bending mosses.

Now, stooping over its brink, she notes her own sweet image in its quivering depths, and wonders vaguely if it is bearing it away to the limitless ocean beyond. The limitless ocean of life—what has that got in store for her? Whither is it hurrying her? To what unknown seas, what tempests? She draws her breath quickly, and laughs at her own dismal imaginings. Nay, then, into what calm depths and pleasant harbours is it carrying her, with Dick for guide and lover and guardian?

Does the thought of him bring him? His voice, far-off as yet, pierces the soft air and comes to her, faintly, but unmistakably. It is the accent dearest to her on earth, and she turns gladly in its direction, and waits with eager longing the coming of its owner.

Evidently he is not alone. His voice is suggestive of question and answer; it rises, fades away into nothingness, as if awaiting a reply, and then rises again. A little feeling that is scarcely jealousy, but is perhaps uncertainty, chills the smile upon Dolores's lips. And now there is no fading away of the voice; it holds its own, without interruption, until it is made plain to the listener that Dick has the conversation all to himself. It is rather a mixed discourse, and has apparently—from the little she can hear of it—a good deal to do with people of another and an airier clime than ours.

There are, for example, allusions made to an ancient dame whose chief purpose in life it seemed to be to clear the sky of superfluous cobwebs; and to an elderly gentleman — an elderly reprobate would be nearer the mark — whose only joy consisted in the possession of “his pipe and his glass and his fiddlers three.”

Then all at once the corner is turned, and Dick comes towards her smiling the fond eager smile that belongs alone to her, bearing in his arms a little curious bundle pressed kindly to his breast. Across the dewy grasses he comes to her, his unwonted burden clinging closely to him.

“Why, it is a little child!” exclaims Dolores, going up to him, and turning a frightened, brown, half-tearful face towards her with a gentle palm.

“Yes, and *such* a little child!” says Dick, laughing. “I found her in the very depths of the wood, like another ‘babe,’ lost, crying her poor little eyes out. And no wonder too!” — looking in friendly wise at the little mite he is carrying, who is gazing back at him with trustful but distended eyes — “when we remember about poor Red-riding-hood and the wolf she met, and all the pixies and giants and——”

“An’ bogies!” says the child, suddenly, with breathless awe; she tightens her arms round his neck. There is plainly a fearful joy to her in this recounting of woodland horrors. After one swift glance at Dolores, she has turned from her and clung afresh to her preserver. She is a singularly pretty child, beautiful with all the charm of undeveloped youth.

“Isn’t she like a woodland elf herself?” asks Dick, admiringly.

"And wasn't it well she met you? Poor little thing! Where does she live?" asks Dolores.

"Somewhere in the village, as far as I can make out. But my small captive is exceedingly vague in her replies. Shall I take her up to the house and get one of the servants to restore her to her mother—whosoever she may be?"

"Yes, yes; and I'll come with you. Her mother—oh, perhaps she is in misery about her all this time."

"It is a long walk there and back. Better stay where you are, darling, and let me dispose of the little one. Rest here upon the bank, and think of me," laughing, "until I return to you; I sha'n't be long."

"Well, hurry then!" she says, reluctantly; and as she lifts her face to kiss the child in his arms, he stoops and kisses *her* as a brief farewell.

She watches him as he moves with quick, strong step towards Greylands, and then, seating herself upon the mossy turf, prepares to wait for his return. The day is warm, seductive, languorous—wooing to slumber; she leans her head upon the scented bank and falls into a profound slumber.

* * * * *

Bending over her, fearful of rousing her from her happy sleep, he notes with a sudden sense of pain the strange sweet delicacy of her face. One little hand is under her white chin, her rounded cheek is buried in velvety mosses; over her head, trailing downwards from the gnarled old oak above her, a fragrant branch of the "lush eglantine" is swaying to and fro, its rich

scents strewing the air and blowing soft into her dainty dreams.

How young, how sweet, how guileless she appears—and alas, how frail! How easily, too, sleep comes to her, as though it is in truth a necessity to her, as if the happy spirit, too strong for the weak body, has wearied it and driven it into the arms of slumber, there to regain its strength.

Kneeling beside her, he puts back with loving careful fingers the little sunny rings of hair, wind-tossed, that lie upon her tranquil brow. He would have liked to take her in his arms and feel her head against his breast, but the fear of wakening her is all too strong within him.

How well he remembers that first day they met, when his eyes had seen her lying in her silken hammock with the seal of Death's twin-sister resting on her as it rests now. It is as but yesterday when thus he saw her—tranquil, unconscious, full of a beauty indescribable that savoured more of heaven than earth. Even then—how long ago it now seems!—all his soul must have gone out to her. But how quiet she is now, how pale; scarcely her breath seems to part her lips! A sudden terror seizes him; he lays his hand upon her arm.

Slowly her white lids updraw themselves, and a gleam from the tender dark grey eyes falls upon his anxious face. First there is a little shrinking, born of uncertainty in her glance, and then an unutterable sweetness, as she realizes the fact that it is indeed her heart's lover who is bending over her.

"Ah, it is you!" she says, with a little sigh of deepest satisfaction, and, with a movement full of

childish grace and pleasure, she lifts one arm and slips it round his neck. "I was tired of waiting. I fell asleep—dreamed——"

"Of me?"

"No; of something vague, shadowy, unhappy. I was in a darkness—a terrible darkness, out of which no one could rescue me. I was groping in a blind fashion where there was nothing to lay hold of—no hope!" she shudders violently. "I was glad when I awoke," she goes on, with a sigh and an involuntary gesture that draws him nearer to her. She pauses, and then finishes with unconscious sadness: "*You* were not there—you did not come to help me."

"Which shows how unstable are all such vapory things as dreams. Where could you be, my beloved, that I would not come to your assistance? Your griefs, your fears, are now all mine."

"There is one thing," says Dolores, lifting herself on her elbow, and looking at him with a grave sweet smile, "that I have never yet told you. It is how much I love you. Do you know how much? With my whole—*whole* heart."

"And I—how do I love you?" asks he, with passionate fondness, tightening his arms round her lissom figure. "Listen——"

"Just as I love you," interrupts she, hastily; "not *less*—not *more*. Why should one of us outdo the other? No; our love is equal in its strength. I could not be dearer to you, Dick, than you are to me."

"I wonder if you know to what a vast amount you are pledging yourself?" asks he, smiling.

"Yesterday"—lifting shy but unfaltering eyes to his—"I was reading a love story, and I was wondering

if it really *was* so sweet to have some one who—who loved one better than all the world beside. And it was a bad hour with me as I thought of all this and doubted; but now—now——”

“Yes—now?” eagerly.

“Ah, now I *know!*” she whispers sweetly, laying her soft head, with a little sigh of content, upon his arm.

“Do you know what you remind me of?” asks Dick, presently. “Of white violets. You are not like a rose or a lily, but a frail, pure violet. I don’t know why it is, but you always make me think of that sweetest of flowers.”

“Do I?”—she smiles at him as if greatly pleased. “Shall I wear violets in my gown at Mrs. Drummond’s ball to-night? Do you know I really think no flowers are so nice as violets. I am so glad you think me like them. I am wearing white, as usual. Shall I put purple violets in the folds? They would not be real, of course; but I think they would look pretty. Yes?”

She raises earnest eyes to his. It is an important question, this arrangement of the coloring that is to render her fair to-night.

“Should I look nice so?” she asks, with pretty anxiety.

“Oh, love, how is it you would *not* look nice?” exclaims he. And then, with sudden sharp fear,—“Oh, darling, why do you look so pale, so fragile? I am afraid for you! A terrible dread that some day you will fade away from me altogether, kills half the happiness your sweet presence yields me.”

“Nay,” returns she, laughing, and tenderly pushing

back the hair from his forehead. "What a silly boy! Am I snow, that I should melt? And all this is because my cheeks are a little pale to-day. Well, I shall punish them." She raises her hands playfully, and pinches her cheeks until perforce the laggard blood rushes into them. "Now shall I fade?" she says, rubbing her lovely flushed face against his.

"Poor little face!" Struggling still with a nameless depression, he draws her closer to him. "I shall not allow you so to ill-use it."

She is smiling at him with parted lips and happy eyes, and with two soft crimson spots upon her cheeks, burned there by the unkindly touch of her slender fingers. She is sitting on the mossy bank, and has taken her knees into her embrace, and is bending towards him.

"Let us talk of something else," she says.

"How can we? It seems to me that there is nothing in all the world but you."

"There you are wrong," murmurs she, lightly, laying her fingers with a quick fond gesture on his lips, "because there is *you!*"

At this they laugh with a soft lightness, not because of the excellence of their small joke, but just for the very love of laughter, they being young and fond and happy withal.

"Oh, Dolores!" says Dick, gently but suddenly taking her face between both his hands. Such a beautiful face, constant and trustful as an angel's! The laughter has died from him now, and there is an intensity of love and passion in his voice, and always too that undercurrent of fear. Having looked at her for a long minute, he lifts the hand that has touched

his lips, and, slipping it round his neck, takes her into his arms and draws her nearer to him until her head rests upon his shoulder.

"You are still unhappy about something," she says, gently, with all the sure intuition of a sweet and sensitive soul. "It is about me? You think I shall die—is it not? But it is not death that will come to me. Comfort yourself with that thought—if it *be* comfort. It will be something else that will come. I don't know what,"—a little vaguely,—“but auntie does. She looks at me so sadly when I laugh or smile. But it will not be death!”

A strange earnest look has come into her face. She presses her lips to his cheek, and then sinks back into his embrace with a little sigh. It is not a sorrowful sigh, but one full of contentment.

"Why should anything come to you but happiness?" says Bouverie. There is a certainty in the way she has declared her disbelief in the advent of death that has somehow comforted him. Any evil, minor to that, would be to him as naught.

"Why, indeed?" returns she, lightly. "And yet—I think it will be so. But"—with a pretty pretence at anger—"have I not told you to talk of something else—anything—but me."

"Of our marriage, then," says Bouverie. "Once you are really mine, what evil thing can assail you? Then your sad little forebodings will die of lack of nutriment. Your lips shall take again that sorrowful curve if they dare! Your eyes—— What eyes you have, Dolores!" He turns up her chin and gazes into the clear depths of her soul's windows with a wondering adoration.

“ ‘Beauty lies in many eyes,
But love in yours, my Nora Creina.’ ”

he chants in a low voice. “But I forget,” he cries presently, with an assumption of terror. “I must talk of anything but you. Of our marriage, then, as I said before.”

“Of our marriage?” She pauses; the colour deepens in her face, and

“From every blush that kindles in her cheeks
Ten thousand little loves and graces spring.”

“Do you know,” she says, softly, “I very often think how it will be with us then,—whether we shall be very unhappy, or——*I* shall be always thinking of you, of course, and wondering how you like this and that and the other things to be done, and what you like best for dinner. That’s a man’s chief thought,—his dinner,—isn’t it? After me,—that is, I mean, of course, after the woman he loves?”

“Is it?” says Bouverie. There is a materialism about this idea that affects him disagreeably.

“Yes,” declares Dolores, with a little assuring nod. “I shall therefore watch you when dinner begins, and every time you refuse a dish I shall dismiss cook,—that is, if she is a mild woman and I am not too much afraid of her.”

“You’re sure to be afraid of any cook, gentle or simple,” says Dick, laughing, and thinking what a darling little mistress of a house she will be. *His* house! “But, as I never yet looked coldly on my dinner, cook’s all right. But where shall we live, Dolores?”

“Ah, *that!*” says Dolores. A trembling silence

follows her exclamation; and then,—“I wanted to say it to you so many times,” she whispers, with a quivering smile: “but—Dick, let us live with auntie!” She has turned to him, an eager pleading in her lovely eyes. “She would not be happy without me,” she says in a low whisper.

“And you?” asks Bouverie, a momentary, most natural, touch of jealousy in his tone. “Could *you* know no happiness without her,—even with me?”

He has taken her hand, and is gazing at her with a strange expression not to be misunderstood. She turns a little white, and her breath comes in soft fitful catches, but her great luminous eyes do not fall before his.

“I should know happiness,” she says, gently,—“a happiness too deep for words,—but not a worthy one. My contentment would be incomplete. Think what auntie has been to me all my life,—my mother, my friend! Should I be the more sacred to you, if I forgot her, when my heart grew filled with the joy of your love? Were *I* to forget, were *you* to counsel forgetfulness—would that be *me*—would that be *you*? Oh, Dick, speak to me!” She bursts out crying.

“I don’t know what I said,” exclaims Dick, distractedly, feeling as if each sob of hers is an arrow dividing his body and soul; “I only know I meant nothing that should distress you. Dolores, my own life, we shall live with auntie—with *any* one,—even with my mother, if you wish it.”

This last awful proposition proves as potent as a magic philter, and instantly restores Miss Lorne to calm.

“Not that,” she exclaims, nervously; “but Dick,—

dear Dick,—are you sure you will not object to have auntie as one of our household? She is *my* mother—let her be yours too.”

“With all my heart,” agrees Dick, genially. “Though how I’m to reconcile it to my conscience, I don’t know! Two mothers! Why, see what an unconscionable lot of trouble it is giving! You make me feel quite ashamed of myself; but, if you *will* have it so—— Now are your eyes dry, you little baby?”

“Yes, yes,” says Dolores, smiling softly. “It was silly of me to doubt you, was it not? But I was just a little afraid of you at first: and——”

“Afraid,” interrupts Bouverie,—“and of me! Darling, let us have that perfect love between us that casteth out fear; let us be of one mind, and”—— stoutly—“let that mind be yours!”

This arrangement is so eminently satisfactory that no further argument ensues upon it.

And now on these two beside the river an exquisite silence falls,—a silence too fraught with unspoken thought to be oppressive—and with thought so sweet! Surely there are moments when bleak earth catches a spark that falls from the fire of heaven!

A tiny squirrel in the old oak-tree above them, springing from branch to branch, pauses abruptly over their heads, and, gaining courage from the utter stillness that encompasses them, sniffs daintily at the pretty picture they present. The soft head of the girl lying so happily upon her lover’s breast, the lover’s glad content, the white robe, the parted lips, the little jewelled hands, and, close to it all, the soft but cruel hurry of the river rushing ever onwards to the ocean,—there is no lingering, no kindly hesitation about *it*,

only a wild, if subdued, hurry to its goal,—to the end of all things.

Dolores, marking the deadly monotony of its haste, shivers slightly in her lover's arms. Do all things hurry so? Is there no gracious delay, no tender dallying? Are life and death but so many quivering eddies that mark, yet fail to check, the vast onrush of Fate? And what is Fate bringing to her? Life, is it,—or death,—or joy perchance,—or perchance——

Ah, what a word to ring in her ears! And yet how loudly it peals through mead and woodland! Shame—*shame!* What can it have to do with *her*? Yet “shame!” is the sound that echoes from sloping hill upon her right, to placid moorland down below.

She flings the echo from her; she laughs inwardly, and nestles a little closer to Bouverie, as though her shield is here. Across the scented grasses a sweet wind is blown,—a music weird and mystical ascends from the bosom of the impatient river. Deep in the wood the sounds of cooing pigeons may be heard.

“The summer leaves hung over our heads,
The flowers burst round our feet,
And in the gloamin’ o’ the wood
The throssil whistled sweet.”

By an effort she rouses herself from the reverie into which they both have fallen.

“Of what are you thinking, O recreant sweetheart,” she murmurs gaily, withdrawing herself from his embrace and turning his chin by a loving touch in her own direction, “that no word has ’scaped you all this long, long time?”

“Why, of my ladye-love, be sure!”

"And she—whom may she be?"

"One Mistress Dolores Lorne, by your grace, madam, an' it please you."

"By my halidame, sir, an' it does please me! An'——Oh, Dick, how nice you look with that stern courtier-like air upon you! But would you"—she hesitates—the admiration so lately assumed dies altogether from her eyes, and a certain fear takes its place—"would you ever look at me like that?" she asks nervously, quite forgetful of her momentary appreciation.

"Am I not looking at you now?"

"Oh, no,—not at me! You imagined me some one else, is it not? But it came to me that, if in the years to come, you were ever to regard me like that, I should——"

"What beloved?"

"Die, perhaps,"—laughing; then—"Tell me," she says, leaning towards him—"are you ever really stern like that? Are you"—leaning even closer—"ever like *your mother?*"

"How can I be sure?" returns he, slowly. "She is my mother. Why should I then positively declare that there is no likeness between us? And yet——"

"Yes?" hopefully and breathlessly.

"I know that I can love, whilst she—— Do you think I would chance anything with you, Dolores? Whatever demon I may have inherited, it is not so strong as the angel that has come to me since first my eyes fell on you. I could not risk anything with *you*. I could not forget the greatness of the gift you have given me,—your own sweet self. I daresay I've got a bad temper. My mother"—with a little bitter laugh

—“reminds me of it often enough to make me sure of it. But, tell me”—gazing anxiously into her luminous eyes—“that you know I should never be anything but gentle with you.”

“Yes; I know it.”

She rises slowly to her feet, and stretches out her arms with a soft languishing gesture towards the setting sun. Then all at once she laughs, and, turning to him, lays both her small palms against his, and gives him a loving but vehement little push.

“And this is how I know it,” she says, with the most charming assumption of sauciness. “It is because you wouldn’t *dare* to be otherwise—so now!”

She shakes her dainty head at him,—her pretty head with all its soft riotous rings of hair that tremble like gold in the dying sunshine. Her parted lips are full of laughter, “her eyes are as eyes of a dove.”

“I must go,” she exclaims, suddenly, lightly unfastening the chains that bind her.

“Not yet. Why, it is quite early.”

“Nevertheless, my last hour has come. I have promised Audrey to give her her tea this afternoon, and it is now half-past four. At five I am due. Give me my hat.”

“Give me some tea, too,” says Mr. Bouverie, eagerly. “I never felt so thirsty in all my life! I’ll come home with you and help you to pour it out. That will be doing you some good.”

“No. Audrey doesn’t care for you, and you don’t care for Audrey. I can’t bear conflicting elements.”

“I won’t say a word that——”

“Good-by,” interrupts Miss Lorne, with decision. “I have seen quite enough of you for one day, con-

sidering I am bound to meet you again to-night. Till then, adieu. Yet stay; as far as the first turn in the avenue counts, you may come with me, but not a step beyond."

"And all this is because of Audrey! 'Oh, my cousin, shallow-hearted,' how I detest you! But for you I should be allowed to enter Paradise!"

"Go to! Your wits wander!" says Miss Lorne. "And if you won't come with me to that first turn, why, good-by then until to-night."

"Oh, I'm coming," says Bouverie, "to the hall door, if I may. There is no false pride about me. And about to-night? You will not be later than ten? You will give me the first dance?"

"If you are in time for it."

"Don't comfort yourself with the thought that I sha'n't be. If, on your arrival you hear of any burglar being secured in the coal-cellar for prowling about the premises during the earlier part of the evening, remember, it is I, being 'in time.'"

"You sha'n't stay there long after *my* arrival," says Miss Lorne, fondly. "With my own hands I shall release you, were there a thousand Drummond's in the way." She slips her hand through his arm, and squeezes it confidentially. "Do you ever think, Dick, how strange a thing it would have been if we had never met and loved?"

"A terrible thing!"

"Should we have met and loved some other people,—*odious* people!—or should we have gone to our graves unwed?"

"Unwed!" declares Dick, with conviction. "How one event changes one's whole life. I suppose, if my

uncle had not fallen over that precipice somewhere in Switzerland, you and I should now have been as apart as though two different spheres held us."

"He was killed?" asks Dolores, with some awed interest.

"Yes. We were poor people at the time it occurred, and his death made such a tremendous difference,—gave my father the title, property, and all. I remember my uncle slightly,—a quiet man like my father, very timid, very silent, and in great awe of my grand-uncle, from whom the money came, as well as the title."

"Why was he afraid of him?" asks Dolores, some vague contempt in her tone.

"Because the property was not entailed all through,—and an empty title is a barren honour. However, the old man died shortly after the accident that killed my uncle, and left all to my father. I think at the time it happened I was sorry about that accident; but I am not sorry now. If it had not occurred, you and I—how impossible it sounds!—would be strangers to each other."

"Poor man! It was sad, though," murmurs Dolores, with a sigh. A passing sigh is all the young can give to a grief of twenty years ago. "Now here is our boundary line," she says, standing at the curve of the avenue and holding out to him a dismissing hand. "Not a word—not an entreaty. Your doom is sealed!"

"Well, you needn't stand so far away from me," protests Dick, aggrieved. "There isn't anybody looking, and therefore nobody can see. Say good-by to me in a more dutiful way than that."

"You are sure—sure"—glancing nervously round

—“that there is no—— Oh, Dick—there! Indeed, you should be more cautious! And—— Good-by again!”

There are several “agains,” and then she runs away from him down the long avenue, and is soon hidden from him by the jealous laurustinas.

CHAPTER XII.

“One warm dream clad about with a fire as of life that endures.”

“Thy lips cannot laugh, and thine eyes cannot weep; thou art pale
as a rose is.”

SWINBURNE.

SHE has barely time to throw off her hat, make herself a degree prettier than she was even a moment since, and enter the library by the upper door, when a servant, throwing open the lower one, announces Miss Ponsonby.

“Ah, I’m so glad I was home in time!” says Dolores, ingenuously, running to her and kissing her warmly.

Between the little heiress who has never known a grief or felt a cynical thought and the cold self-contained girl always so bitterly resentful of the poverty to which she was born, a strange friendship has arisen.

“I was so afraid I should be late; I have only just come in myself. Take off your hat.”

“You were walking?”

“Yes, with—— Yes.” She blushes faintly, and busies herself drawing forward a low lounging-chair for her visitor’s comfort.

“With Dick,” says Audrey, calmly. “Well, he is more fortunate than most.”

"Because I walked with him?" laughs Dolores, lightly, lifting her brows.

"That too. But I was not so much thinking of this hour's grace accorded him, as of the fact that probably you will let him walk through life beside you. Now, that is a speech that requires no answer. If I am right, so much the better for him. If I am wrong, why, then I can almost find it in my heart to pity him, though his race are not altogether dear to me. What a perfect day it has been—what an evening it *is!*"

"Why should we waste it in-doors?" exclaims Dolores, gaily. "The orchard is a happier hunting-ground than this can be. There may be some strawberries still left, and I'll tell them to send us out some extra cream for them with our tea; but perhaps"—with a hesitating glance at the cool room she has spoken of abandoning.

"No," says Audrey; "you need not be afraid of that. What room—even the loveliest—can bear comparison with the summer air? 'Stone walls,' so far as I am concerned, always 'a prison make.'"

"Auntie has gone to the town; so we shall be all alone," says Dolores.

Slowly sauntering towards the orchard, they enter it presently through its ivied gateway and fling themselves, with a glad sense of youth and freedom, upon a mossy bank beneath a gnarled old apple-tree.

"How cool it is here—how quiet—no noise," says Audrey, clasping her arms behind her head and gazing upward at the liquid blue of the evening sky.

"No boys!" returns Dolores, laughing.

"It means quite the same thing."

"Sometimes—just at first, when I knew you, I used to think, whenever you spoke of the boys, that you meant your brothers."

"No; my mother spared me that infliction at least—

‘I am all the daughters of my father’s house
And all the brothers too.’

I suppose I should speak of them as ‘the pupils;’ but somehow ‘the boys,’ comes more naturally. What a torment they are, what a grinding horror! And yet”—with some remorse—“it is a shame to be so hard on them. Sometimes—even to them—I confess I am grateful to them. They mean so much to us in many ways. Where would Dad be without his books, for instance? The fact is, Dad and I are carnivorous animals, and live on the boys.”

“Still, young boys I dare say are——”

“Young!” For an instant Miss Ponsonby glances at her; and then she laughs faintly. “They aren’t always so very young,” she says. “I would they were; they would be just half the trouble then. It is big boys that worry. We have them at seventeen, twenty, twenty-one, and so on. Once we had one at twenty-seven. He was the dullest boy of the lot—so dull indeed that I don’t think he will ever be anything else. Perpetual youth is his lovely portion.”

“What became of him?” asks Dolores, who has been secretly wondering if she means Sir Chicksy, but is at last comforted by the reflection that certainly twenty-seven summers have not passed over that gentleman’s flaxen head.

“We only kept him four months, as, beyond laying his exceedingly large hand and small fortune at my

feet every second day and eating unlimited jam tarts, he did literally nothing."

"How tiresome!"

"It wasn't—not exactly. He did both things so thoroughly, and always at full length under the big acacia, that he ceased to trouble us after a bit. I almost missed him and his proposals when he went. Perhaps I missed the tarts even more. He was most generous in his distribution of them."

"Do all the boys propose to you?" asks Dolores, who is much fetched by this idea, and is regarding Miss Ponsonby with an irrepressible smile.

"Pretty nearly," returns Audrey, with imperturbable gravity; then, all in one moment, she gives way to a merry burst of laughter very unusual to her. "You see, Dad has the reputation of being so clever, and indeed *is* so clever," with loving pride, "that they send him all the forlorn cases as a last resource; and sometimes he does manage to push them through in spite of Dame Nature. But why they must all arrange to believe themselves in love with me is the amusing part of it."

"It sounds amusing, certainly. Just fancy a youthful regiment on its knees to one all day long!"

"Sometimes it is unpleasant," confesses Audrey, with a change of feature, "sometimes"—looking earnestly at Dolores and speaking in a low tone—"they *weep*, and that's hateful! I've known them get so damp and so limp, that after indignantly refusing them, I have had to support them back to the house. And then, when they used to sit through dinner without eating a morsel, and with their eyes and noses as red as fire, Dad used to ask me what it all meant;

and, when he found out, he would be very angry and want to send the luckless boy away; and of course that was awkward, you know, as—as—well, of course you understand”—a little impatiently—“that the money the boy paid was of great importance to us.”

“Of course,” says Dolores, with the simplest, most business-like tone in the world. It soothes the other and drives the little frown from her brow.

“Whatever you do,” she says, smiling again at Dolores, “don’t encourage a lover who looks even *inclined* to cry; it will embitter your life. But I forget; my advice is not wanted here. I don’t believe Dick could cry even if he tried.”

“You should know, being his cousin,” says Dolores colouring sweetly at the mention of his name, as she always does, but looking in no wise embarrassed. “What an irrelevant remark of yours! ‘What’s Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba?’”

“You alone can answer that question.” She is silent for an insignificant time, and then, reverting to her first topic, “There is one thing redeeming,” she says, “about the boys—they all love Dad! Even when they go away they don’t forget him. But that,” with a swift brightening of her rather cold and haughty face, “is not to be wondered at.”

“No,” returns Dolores, with a subtle touch of sympathy. “I have seen him.”

“Does it ever occur to you,” exclaims Audrey, growing suddenly animated, “how he can be Lady Bouverie’s brother? What faintest connecting link is there between them? She so insolent, so overbearing, he so tender, so——” Her voice falls, and a beautiful dreamy expression comes into her eyes.

"Your cousin Dick was telling me to-day of how Lady Bouverie once was quite poor," says Dolores.

"Yes; I expect the sudden unexpected rise to a title and a decent rent-roll was too much for her. She hasn't recovered it yet, you see. That word 'lady' is an everlasting delight to her. I can fancy how openly glad she was when that poor man fell over that cliff, or whatever it was. I remember him myself, but very slightly—I was only a child then, a mere baby—an aimless, helpless sort of man, just like Sir George, and very good-natured. I think for the one week I knew him I lived on lollipops. Papa always speaks very kindly of him; but then he speaks kindly of his sister, Lady Bouverie, too, so that his word doesn't go for much. Yet I don't wish you to think that," she says, smiling, "because I would have you believe that the pretty things he says of you he really *does* mean, and that he likes you more than most."

"It is only fair that he should like his daughter's friend," replies Dolores, feeling strangely attracted to her because of this great love for her father that is betraying itself in every word and glance.

"There is one thing that gives me deep pleasure—one thought rather," goes on Audrey, turning her face slowly until her eyes rest on Dolores. "If you should chance to marry Dick, Dad will be your uncle."

"And you my cousin." Dolores, colouring warmly, holds out her hand to her. She smiles; and then all at once a little grim look of comic dismay desolates her face. "And Lady Bouverie my mother-in-law!" she adds, slowly.

Audrey laughs.

"It does take the guilt off—doesn't it?" she says

Then, after a moment's silence, "How happy some o'er other some can be!" I wonder if Dick knows how lucky he is? It will be the happiest thing for him."

"Why should it not be the happiest thing for me too?" asks Dolores, gently. "We have not spoken of our engagement yet to any one, except to auntie, and now to you; but of course all the world has seen how it is with us. And I am glad they *have* seen," with a little sudden quickening of her breath and a sudden paling of her lovely face. "Why should one seek to hide one's joy? Yet to actually speak of it, to put it all into words, that is difficult."

"My aunt—does she know?"

"Not yet. I told Dick to keep it a secret from his mother for yet a little while; but I suppose she has made a good guess at it. She—she has been very—one doesn't know what to call it," breaks off Dolores, laughing, "but very affectionate to me of late. At least that is what I am sure she has meant to be."

"Very!" says Audrey, dryly.

"If I were to become a Cinderella to-morrow, I wonder how it would be with her then?"

"You would be 'Miss Lorne' then, not her 'pretty Dolores,' and when she met you, it is amazing what an amount of eye-glass she would require to be able to see you, and her tone, when she 'hoped you were quite well,' would be sufficient to make you quite ill, and her hurried but frozen adieu would bring you to death's door; and besides——"

"The picture is complete," interrupts Dolores, laughing. "Your style is decidedly graphic. Let us rejoice in the fact that I shall never be called upon to

enact the *rôle* of a modern Cinderella. Oh, by-the-by, Audrey, I am so sorry you will not let us call for you to-night; but you were right yesterday. In your place, I should have rejected Mrs. Drummond's invitation just as you did."

"Every one detests me so," says Miss Ponsonby, frowning and plucking a daisy to pieces. "Yet what have I done to any of them?"

"You are so much prettier than they are!"

"Yet so are you; and they all profess—nay, they all *do* like you. There must be something morally wrong with me; yet how to change when my fault is unknown to me? Perhaps I should be more meek, perhaps I should have accepted Mrs. Drummond's words in a different spirit, though they were spoken at the eleventh hour, and only because the duchess thought me worth a word or two and an invitation to the castle."

"Mrs. Drummond made a mistake; I think you were right in showing it to her," replied Dolores, quietly. "Is Sir Chicksy going?"

"About him I have been more worried than I can tell you. He declares nothing will induce him to go; and, absurd as he looks, he is really very difficult to manage in small affairs of this kind."

"His not going will look rather marked."

"That is what I told him; but he seemed to think that reason for his going only an extra inducement to stay at home." Miss Ponsonby laughs a short joyless laugh, and gives the soft frill round her neck a vicious little pull.

"He is very much in love with you," says Dolores, gravely; "and sometimes I do not understand whether

that pleases or annoys you. He is a kindly young man, I know; he—he has many——”

“Don’t say good qualities!” interrupts Audrey, calmly. “That would be the finishing stroke to whatever chance he may have.”

“Chance! Tell me”—looking earnestly at her—“do you mean to marry him?”

“Well, why should I not? He is an excellent *parti*,” exclaims, Audrey, defiantly; “and he has no father, or mother, or sister, or brother to consult, or to be furious with him for marrying a girl without a penny. About family there is no question,” she says, with a proud gesture, “on either side.”

“You *think* of marrying him, then?” says Dolores, a little carefully-suppressed surprise, a little well-bred regret in her tone. She blushes up to her very brow as she asks the question, and looks abashed at her own temerity. When, a moment since, she had asked the same question in different words, she had expected the answer to be a straight-forward “No,” and had found no difficulty in propounding it. But now, as the immense truth dawns upon her that in reality Audrey may bring herself to wed Sir Chicksy, she feels strange towards her, and a little upset as to her former calculations. She hesitates,—but, as no reply comes from Audrey, something within her—something pure and true—compels her at all hazards to conquer her cowardice, or fear of giving offence. Lifting her lowered eyes, she says impulsively, “He is not good enough for you.”

“I wonder if I am good enough for him, or any other man?” returns Audrey, with quick bitterness. “Do you think I care whether he be good or bad? I

tell you"—leaning towards her, and pushing her dark hair in an impatient manner from her forehead—"I only care to know whether his rent-roll is really what he says it is—*that* I have ascertained to be the truth, and so no hesitation is left to me. I am mercenary; I love money; I would, I believe, sell my soul to be rich and great in the world's eyes."

"How can you so deliberately lie about yourself?" says Dolores, calmly, though the other's suppressed excitement has its influence upon her.

"There—you see I have shocked you! Good little girls like you," exclaims Audrey, with a reckless laugh, "who have never known what poverty means, or the scorn society amasses, to pour broadcast upon those who lack this world's goods, cannot understand such natures as mine. Yet it is the very society of which you are a member that forms such natures. I think I hate rich people!" She pauses, and then a revulsion of feeling comes to her, and she goes on again quite calmly: "You think Sir Chicksy is not good enough for me; but you won't to-morrow, when you dwell on the knowledge of me I have now given you; and, besides—besides, he can give Dad his books—the claret that I cannot give him—the South of France—*life!*" Her voice fails her; yet, though she is as pale as death, and her eyes are heavy with miserable tears, she looks straight at Dolores frowningly, as though forbidding her to offer any sympathy.

But Dolores is not to be forbidden. Audrey has put out her hand as though to bar any approach, yet Dolores creeps up to the antagonistic hand, which is

in truth but a very frail barricade, and slips her arm round Audrey's neck.

"I always thought I liked you the best of my many friends here," she whispers softly. "Now I know it; but—oh, dear, dear Audrey, why need you make this sacrifice? Other people are rich: other people love you."

"Oh, no, no, no!" cries Audrey paling and shrinking from her.

"There is one," says Dolores, in a quick hurried tone, tightening her clasp,—“one to whom you are unkind, to whom you show yourself in all your most unlovable moods. And, as for him,—I cannot always understand him indeed; but this I know, that you are well beloved by——”

With a passionate exclamation, Miss Ponsonby, springing to her feet, pushes the girl back from her, and gazes at her from an assured distance, with crimson cheeks and flashing eyes.

"How *dare* you speak so to me?" she breathes in a low panting tone, scarcely audible. "How dare you take such a liberty? There is no one who loves me; it is an insult—a——"

She turns abruptly away, and walks in a rapid inconsequent fashion down the garden path, increasing the distance between her and Dolores with all the speed of which she is capable. Her every movement is full of a suppressed agitation, born of passionate fear and a feeling she believes is anger, and a vague horror of herself.

Dolores, stricken dumb, stands motionless upon the mossy sward, with the boughs of the apple-tree swaying above her head, and just a glimpse of the

eternal blue of heaven beyond. What has she done? What was it she said? A pang of terrible self-reproach shoots through her tender heart as she watches that tall haughty figure hurrying away from her towards the garden gate. When she has disappeared through the ivied portals will she ever return?

Pale as a small ghost, she clasps her hands together and feels as one might who has just committed a murder of the most cold-blooded description. She makes a step forward with the intention of overtaking and compelling that determined figure to believe her innocent of studied offence, when all at once Audrey pauses, hesitates, and, finally, turning sharply round, comes back to her.

"Forgive me!" she says, abruptly, her face very white. "I should not so have spoken to you. It was rude, and, besides that, absurd. There is no real reason why you should not speak to me of him as well as of Sir Chicksy." No name has been mentioned between them of this second suitor, yet both seem to understand. "And I should have remembered," continues Miss Ponsonby, growing even paler, "how impossible it would be to *you* in any case to be the offender." Great tears rise now and glisten in her eyes.

"Audrey," whispers Dolores, going up to her and laying her arms loosely round her neck, so that she can lean back and study the other's face as she speaks, "at least believe this of me, that my liking for you is sincere enough to prevent my saying a hurtful word to you."

"It is the living of my whole life in this narrowed place that has spoiled me," murmurs Audrey, faintly

smiling. "I grow more morbid, suspicious—*hateful*, if I dare confess the truth. But only to you, Dolores, will I do that. Just now you were speaking of Anthony Vyner, is it not?"

"Yes. What fault do you find in him, that you should be so incensed with me for my bare mention of his name?"

"The most damning fault of all—his inability to appreciate my many charms!" She laughs softly but bitterly. "Don't say they are not many," she goes on quickly. "Recollect, the truth, if salutary, is always rude." She smiles again. "The fact is Mr. Vyner detests me nearly as much as I detest him. There is an antagonism between us that I believe only life can end. And, indeed, will it end it? What is life, after all, but a pause, a station in our souls' journey? Something tells me the repulsion that Mr. Vyner and I feel towards each other will last through all eternity."

"Speak of your own repulsion," returns Dolores, quietly; "that is, of course, to you understood; but Mr. Vyner's feelings are not to be so lightly canvassed. I do not think you judge him aright. You say I am wrong in believing he loves you; I admit my error in that respect, if indeed it be one; but that he hates you—no, no! He certainly does not *hate* you. I think he likes you."

A sudden passionate colour flames and dies in Miss Ponsonby's cheeks.

"How good that is of him!" she says, in a carefully modulated voice. "Poor Anthony! It must be an everlasting trouble to him to like me, considering how well he knows me. It is indeed too much. But

see, Dolores, who is that coming through the arched gateway?"

"Tea," declares Dolores, in a gratefully explanatory, if a scarcely grammatical, manner—"and Wylde. What have you got there, Wylde?"—addressing the grey-haired butler who is approaching them, followed by an attendant satellite.

"Small bottle of champagne, miss. Thought you'd like it with your strawberries; tea is only just made, miss; so it can wait a bit."

"Oh, *thank* you, Wylde!" says Dolores, looking with tender friendship at the old man, who has followed her fortunes through the half of Europe. "Do you know you have brought us the very thing for which Miss Ponsonby and I have been sighing? And, Wylde," calling after him as he beats a smiling retreat, "be sure you let me know when auntie returns."

"Sure to, miss," bows Wylde, with a deferential—if confidential—gesture.

CHAPTER XIII.

“Let me think yet a little: I do know
These things were sweet, but sweet such years ago
Their savour is all turned now into tears.”

SWINBURNE.

THE day dies: vanishes into the dull past that holds our dearest secrets; and suddenly night comes on us, covering all things.

At the stuccoed mansion of the Drummonds the fiddles are sounding, and bright forms are making the most of the glad hour accorded them. Fountains are dripping musically; the air is heavy with the breath of dying flowers; it is twelve o'clock, and the ball is at its height. The music grows sweeter, softer. One begins to take to heart the languorous, numerous meanings of the floating perfumed fans.

* * * * *

Down far below in the valley, a girl, tall, but spirit-broken, is standing in an open window. She is clad in a wide clinging gown, and is gazing eagerly with great sad straining eyes at certain yellow lights that, two miles away, can yet be caught through the still haze of the summer night.

After all, was she so wise in refusing that invitation? Dolores had said she was; but—life is short! Why not take from it the very meagre enjoyment it offers to the hungry seeker after distraction? And

yet—— How chilly it grows. How long it seems since last she heard the human voice that some mistaken person once called “divine!”

Down there—glancing at the pale yellow lights so far away—every one no doubt is happy, regardless of everything but the present moment. Ah, happy present! What more natural than that they should lose themselves in it? If she were there, she, too, doubtless would be cruelly regardless of the outer world. But then——

* * * * *

The night is still beyond all imaginings. The scent of the tall white lilies outside burdens the air. “Unpavilioned heaven is fair,” rich in its countless stars,—

“And through the dim wood Dian threads her way.”

The girl leaning against the shutters of the open window sighs a little, and her beautiful haughty face takes a mournful droop. Her lips curve downwards, her eyes grow sad and moist; yet always the yellow lights gleam in the cruel distance, and almost the sound of the fiddles comes to her on the ambient air. She stirs impatiently and tightens her fingers, as if unconsciously, upon the soft crimson rose with which she has been toying. It shrinks and dies beneath her pressure, and one drop of moisture, blood-red in her imagination, as though distilled from its heart, crawls over and under and through her white fingers as though in protestation against her idle deed.

But to her it is as though the rose never existed. Her eyes are ever fixed upon the lights so far removed from her, and a sense of desolation covers her.

The tears gather in her eyes and blot out those vexing, shining lights—and blot out too the figure of a man that, advancing rapidly through the shrubbery, enters the second window, and, crossing the room, is at her side before she has time to recognize him.

It is Anthony Vyner, a little heated from his run, with his hair ruffled and quite a triumphant light in his eyes.

Audrey, moving backwards involuntarily, seizes the curtain with one hand and gazes at him in speechless amazement.

"You?" she whispers, breathlessly.

"Is it?" inquires Mr. Vyner, genially. "Perhaps so! No doubt you'd know. I seldom understand myself, so there can be nothing remarkable in the fact that I don't always know myself. I thought I was at Mrs. Drummond's; but if"—with a delicate deference to her opinion—"you insist on saying this is I, why, I'll take your word for it."

"What brought you here?" asks Audrey, who has grown very white from the suddenness of the shock his unexpected appearance has caused her.

"Now that I come to think of it," says Mr. Vyner, airily, "I don't know. I never go into my own motives. Long, long since I found they weren't worth it. Lovely night, isn't it?"

"What brought you?" persists Audrey, unflinchingly. There is a little flash in her sombre eyes, her hand tightens on the curtain.

"If," says Mr. Vyner, plaintively, "I now stated to you an incontrovertible fact, and told you the simple beautiful truth, and said it was my ten toes

and my two heels, I dare say you would think me rude—eh?”

“You are always rude,” says Miss Ponsonby, calmly, “so that goes for nothing. Still I must ask you to answer my question. What brought you here at this hour?”

“It is impossible to be sure. But I suppose it is whatever brought me here at any other hour.”

“Will you answer me or not?” demands she, angrily.

“How can I? It is so awfully hard to find out. If even ‘human love be not the growth of human will,’ how shall I know what strange force drove me abroad to-night to wander afield amidst Cimmerian darkness and meditate upon——”

“Now that you have come, and refuse a reason for your coming, I must only beg you will go again,” interrupts Audrey, haughtily.

She drops the curtain and turns disdainfully towards the door; but, when she is only halfway to it, Mr. Vyner springs to his feet and hurries after her.

“Eureka!” exclaims he, with the triumphant air of one who has proved himself victorious over some brain-worry. “I’ve found it! What a fortunate thing, isn’t it?”—looking to her for sympathy. “And just at the last moment, too. Another hesitation, and I should have been—lost; you would have gone.”

“Well?” says Audrey, severely, standing a good way back from him and gazing at him with unfriendly eyes, “well?”

It is plain she is not to be done out of the desired explanation.

“My presence here, Miss Ponsonby,” begins he,

with an artless candour, "at this unseemly hour was caused, I have just discovered, by an overpowering desire to see——"

Miss Ponsonby frowns.

"Wait a bit!" exclaims he, hastily. "To see—to see anything that was far away from Mrs. Drummond! There—you cannot object to that, can you?"

"I don't object to anything," returns Audrey, just a little wearily.

She has come back to her window again, and is now leaning out towards the scented darkness, as though wooing a touch from the cool night wind. Down far below, in the woods of Greylands, the nightingales are singing their wild sweet catches, answering each other from branch to branch. It is a heavenly harmony that beats upon the heart, and seeks—as though it were the herald of peace—to enter there. But sometimes pulses throb too madly, and sad hearts are too full to admit of any new-comer, whatever name he bear.

"Yes, I was saturated with Mrs. Drummond. I thought I'd leave whilst yet there was time," goes on Mr. Vyner, after a brief glance at her. He too is leaning out of the window beside her, being no doubt as smitten with the beauty of the night as she is. "I felt, if I stayed a second later, that my hour would be come. And—as a mother-in-law now—do you think she would be nice?"

"I never think of her," replies she, her head turned away from him as she gazes into the cool misty mysteries of the summer night.

"I would that I were you," says Mr. Vyner. "She preys upon my brain; although"—with a sudden bril-

liant change of tone and a benignity of countenance that would have made his fortune had he begun life as a dissenting minister—"it must be acknowledged that our dear friend is a very sweet creature, *such* an affectionate disposition, such a flow of soul—eh?"

"Did anything else flow to-night?" asks Miss Ponsonby, turning upon him suddenly, with a suspicion of wrath in her dark eyes. "Have you had too much of their execrable champagne? The idea would suggest itself. What occasions your high spirits—what has induced you to leave your partners to come *here*?"

"Haven't I told you?" returns Mr. Vyner, reproachfully. "It was pure fright that drove me from the palatial halls of the people beyond. How their lamps shine through the density that parts us! Why, they put the very stars to shame! But what's the good of being a parvenu if you can't outshine your neighbours—eh? Yes, it was funk *pur et simple* that bid me beat a hasty retreat. They were all getting too fond of me—too sugary. By-the-by, perhaps it is the old fellow's—the grandfather's—molasses that makes them all so sweet?"

"What an opinion you have of yourself!" says Audrey, with a curling lip. "Do you indeed think that all the world is so anxious to marry you?"

"No, not *all* the world!" He looks at her fixedly, and she returns the look. "I have the very best reasons for knowing that all the world is not so favourably disposed towards me," he says, presently. "Now you, for instance"—she moves impatiently away, and a faint expression that is either amusement or uncertainty or annoyance crosses his face—"you

would not, I know, deign to look at me were I to lay my allegiance at your feet."

"That is a good thing for you to know," returns she, coldly. "Perhaps, if you came to the same knowledge about many other women of your acquaintance, you would find yourself on a safer level than you are at present. You think Miss Drummond——"

"I don't *think* that; I'm sure of it. When she had for the third time done me the honour to ask me to be her partner, I felt I must run for it. And then I thought I'd come down here and ask you what she meant."

"Even if she did make up her mind to marry you," says Miss Ponsonby, surveying him with leisurely contempt, "she would be miles too good for you."

"That's just what I thought," smiles he, equably, "so I flew. 'Never,' said I to myself, 'shall I be the cause of bringing down misery upon the head of this admirable girl. Were I to be the means of rendering her unhappy, I should never forgive myself. No, even though the determination cost me my life, I will be generous in this matter; I will *not* marry her!' And then, as you know, I arrived here in a state of mind bordering upon coma. You may remember I couldn't give you so much as a decent answer to a most simple question. You recollect that?—I say, Audrey, couldn't we find some supper somewhere? I'm right down hungry; self-denial of the sort I have just described and suppressed affection and all that sort of thing is very exhausting, and—er—very appetizing."

"Certainly not," says Miss Ponsonby, with stern

decision. "If you want supper, go back to Mrs. Drummond."

"Not if I were starving! Do you think I'd risk Georgina's blandishments again? Don't be brutal, Miss Ponsonby. 'Tis ill fighting with an hungry man. What had you for dinner?"

"Roast beef," confesses she, reluctantly.

"Cold roast beef," says he, meditatively, "Worcester sauce! fresh bread-and-butter! It might be worse—*far* worse! Come along"—jovially tucking his arm *bon camarade* fashion into hers—"and we'll make a night of it!"

"Come—*where?*" demands she, making an ineffectual effort to untuck herself. Evidently "Dad's" old boy is not to be lightly got rid of.

"Into the pantry, of course," returns he, unabashed.

"You have made a mistake," says Miss Ponsonby, stubbornly resolved not to yield an inch. "Into the pantry I don't go. Go back to the Drummonds!"

"I have told you already why I can't. Would you thrust me into the arms of Georgina? Is this your vaunted affection for me?"

"Affection! For *you!*" exclaims she, regarding him with withering scorn.

"You would deliberately fling me into the prepared pitfall? Was it for this you kept Chaucer at home? I daresay you knew, if he had been there, my danger would not only have been lessened, but have been *nil!* A baronet is dearer to their souls than a commoner could ever be. A title counts. Your studied cruelty is more than I can bear. Would you have me *marry* Georgina?"

"I don't care whom you marry," exclaims she, with a passionate stamp of her foot; "only go away."

"I can't," says Mr. Vyner, sinking into a chair, "I'm too far gone. The walk home would be much too much for me. Do you think 'Dad,' if he knew it, would send me hungry from his door?"

At this she struggles wildly with a rising force within her, and at last they both burst out laughing. It does her good. When the small paroxysm is over, she sighs heavily, and looks at him.

"By-the-by, where is Dad?" asks he.

"In bed—two hours ago."

"Sleeping the sleep of the just, no doubt; if not, no one ever did it. And Sir Chicksy?"

"In bed too, I trust."

"So do I. For once we are agreed. And an excellent place it is for him. I hope his dreams are rose-coloured. I'm so fond of Chaucer that I'd always have him in bed, if I couldn't have him in heaven. Are the servants in bed also?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean to say"—with a quick glance at her pale profile—"that you have been keeping a lonely vigil here for nearly three hours?"

"I didn't find it lonely. Do you think," with an angry contraction of her brows, "that I am a child or a fool, to be terrified by the mere fact of being alone?"

"Ah, true. I forgot that mind of yours—the amazing strength of it. But even that, I suppose, cannot keep you from feeling the pangs of hunger at times? Do say you could eat something now, if only to please me."

In truth the girl is looking very wan and tired and disheartened, in spite of her efforts at control.

"If I am not you are," she says, evasively. "Come to the pantry, then, since you won't go back to Mrs. Drummond. As you say," wistfully, "I suppose Dad would not like you to leave his house hungry."

"I expect 'Dad' is my saving clause. *You* have no bowels of mercies. Never mind; I forgive you. By the way, why didn't Sir Chicksy turn up at the Drummonds' to-night?"

"Because I declined to go."

"Well done himself! Now who says 'men are deceivers ever—constant to one love never?' William Shakespeare, I despise you! Your supposed knowledge of human nature is a big swindle. But stay—I forget. He never knew our Chicksy, that perhaps accounts for it. I say, Audrey, you've got a new lock to the pantry since I was here! The last one, at least, the one that I knew, used to wobble—*so!* Remember! By-the-by, I'm not a bit surprised, you know, that Sir Chicksy is so head over ears in love with you."

"No? Neither am I," returns Miss Ponsonby, indifferently.

"Good girl!" murmurs Mr. Vyner.

Whereupon, Audrey, stirred by some secret emotion, breaks into a low gay laugh, a laugh very different from the mirth of a moment since, which indeed had been half vexatious. She is of those people whose laughter is infrequent, and therefore her mirth, when heard, is more infectious than that of most.

"Dear me!" exclaims Mr. Vyner, with concern, gazing at her with exaggerated amazement. "Are you ill? Has anything hurt you?"

"No; but yet my laughter has done me good; it has opened my heart. To prove it, I will confess that if you unfasten the door of the safe over there, you will find, not only the beef I spoke of, but a chicken."

"Ye gods," cries Mr. Vyner, "why don't you come down from Olympus?" He opens the door of the safe. "And a very nice plump chicken too!" he remarks, admiringly. "After all, I'm rather glad the gods have not responded to my call. It will just be enough for you and me."

Miss Ponsonby has covered the small table near her with a white cloth and with the most astonishing rapidity. Not the very faintest suspicion of *mauvaise honte* is discernible in her movements—not even the knowledge that at Mr. Vyner's own home servants in livery perform for him all such services as these, has the power to render her awkward or self-conscious. Anthony Vyner was for too many years one of "the boys"—even though, during his time, she was but a tall, slender, impetuous child, only half conscious of the existence of anything save fruits and flowers—to be ever considered a stranger by her, no matter how antagonistic she may feel towards him now that the waves of time have rolled a little farther on.

Just at this moment he is on his knees before a small cupboard, searching it diligently for something that evidently is not there. To even an unobservant looker-on it might suggest itself that it is not the first time he and she have supped together in this pantry.

"You won't find them there," declares Audrey at last, becoming aware, after a prolonged patting of her cloth to take out certain creases, that her guest is still

sprawling on the floor in his evening-clothes and with his head lost in the dim recesses of the cupboard. "We always keep the forks and spoons in the big press now."

"Do you?" says Vyner, scrambling to his feet once more. "So much the better; an affair like this, with its lower shelves almost on the ground, is very trying, and, besides, it is such a rickety old thing."

"It is not a bit more rickety now than it was—then," says Miss Ponsonby, in an offended tone; yet there is just now a little softness about her anger that would have been foreign to her in more orthodox moments.

"Not a bit, not a bit!" acquiesces he, cheerfully. "As you say, I defy it to be more unstable now than it was *then*: then!" repeats he, with a sigh—is it a real sigh or only part of his usual idle careless manner, that is never more than half earnest? "What a very dear little girl you were," he says, "in that pleasant far-off 'then'!"

"There is one thing I would say to you," says Miss Ponsonby, standing very still and very upright at the other side of the table, with a salt-cellar in one hand and a mustard-pot in the other, "and I would have you remember it for all your days; it is this: I object to compliments in every shape and form, whether they refer to my past, my present, or my future. You will be so good as never to forget that."

"I shall be so good;" returns Mr. Vyner, amicably, who, for his part, is armed with a loaf of bread, a carving-knife, and a decanter; "I promise you most faithfully *never to forget!*"

There is a faint depth in his tone that causes her to glance at him suspiciously; just then, as it happens, he too is looking at her; her brows contract.

"No, really," he goes on, gaily, "there is no occasion for distrust: I mean it—I sha'n't forget, *ever*. That is obeying you, is it not? And fortunately my memory is excellent. Why, it seems to me now only as yesterday since I, an overgrown lad, used to carry you for miles through heather and stubble, and think myself richly rewarded at the last if you—what a little tyrant you were!—would give me a kiss for my reward."

"Ah!" says the girl. She lays her hand upon the back of a chair, then gazes at him with a pale face and with an expression of concentrated wrath within her eyes.

"Well, what if you did kiss me then?" persists he, with a little laugh, lifting his brows. "You were but a wilful child of nine, and you don't kiss me now, worse luck"—laughing again—"so why look at me like that? But come to supper, I entreat you, with what appetite we may. By-the-by, how is it with you?"

"I feel as if I hadn't eaten anything for a week," confesses Audrey: with a sudden revulsion of feeling she finds herself smiling back at him. After all, what is to be gained by encouraging disdain or nursing one's wrath for a creature so indifferent to one's love or hatred? And, besides, what comes of one's joys and griefs? An end once attained, how poor it appears! All life's big designs are so many glittering myths only put forward to tempt one to a betrayal of

one's sad weaknesses, to show up the very poverty of one's so-called strength. She will forget for a little hour her cares, her secret sorrow that is scarce acknowledged even to her own heart, that little dread about "Dad's" health—*everything*, and take the good the moment gives. "Just imagine if Mrs. Drummond were to see you now," she says, with a bright eager light upon her beautiful face that is very seldom seen there, "despising her ball, her guests, her——"

"Daughter! the fond Georgina—and all for you! *There* would lie the sting. I'm only sorry for one thing," says Mr. Vyner, thoughtfully; "and I must say it was amiss of me; why on earth didn't I think of secreting a bottle of her champagne about my portly person before quitting her ancestral bowers?"

A little shade falls on Audrey.

"Ah!" she says. "You see you should have stayed there; you would have had a so much better supper." A vivid fixed crimson springs into her cheek; an expression that may be termed shy creeps into her downcast face. It is not so easy, in spite of strong resolution, to forget that terrible bugbear the want of money.

"You don't often make silly speeches," remarks Mr. Vyner, calmly, after a long minute's silence spent in contemplation of that wonderfully new and pretty diffidence upon the face opposite; "but just now you have managed it. Let me assure you that the supper is not known upon earth, that would tempt me from the one now before me."

She makes him no answer; and again he loses himself in a lengthened study of her expression. To

make an analytical examination of every character that may come beneath his notice has been his almost unconscious habit for many years. And what a programme she has presented him with to-night, what a hurried list of most of the deeper emotions—dignity, gaiety, reproach, anger—and, after all, this strange sweet embarrassment that has fallen upon her, this most childish of all the emotions, this girlish shyness, this last phase of her varied humours has suited her best. How pretty she looks, how beautifully white are her hands, how—— Pshaw!

“To return to our first thought,” he says lightly. “You were wondering what Mrs. Drummond would say if she could now look in upon me. I turn the tables upon you, madam. I ask you how would it be were Sir Chicksy at this awful juncture to look in upon you?”

“Well, what if he did?”—coldly.

“I’d be afraid to think. Would he—you know him well!—would he murder me? Fancy an apparition of Sir Chicksy standing in yonder doorway armed with a claymore,—he is a Scotch baronet, is he not?—and with a dangling night-cap on his sunny head! By-the-by, he wears a night-cap, doesn’t he?” He pauses, and gazes at her as if for information.

“What!” Miss Ponsonby stares at him, considerably taken aback by his rather suggestive question; then—“I’m sure I don’t know!” she says, indignantly.

“Then, as none of us know, I’m absolutely positive he does,” declares Mr. Vyner, unmoved. “A *high* one, generously tasselled. I believe it would be a tassel that would bob over his aristocratic nose—a most con-

foundling tassel, of abnormal stoutness and unparalleled length. I feel I should go down before it—I should go——”

“Go home?” suggests Miss Ponsonby.

“Oh, not yet! Do not make your gentle hint more apparent; I have not yet half finished this paragon among chickens. Now tell me why you would not go to Mrs. Drummond’s to-night.”

“First, because she did not choose to ask me until she found the duchess was in my favour. But the joke of this part of my story lies in the fact that she might quite as well have given me my invitation at the proper moment, as I should undoubtedly at any time have refused it.”

“But why—why?”—a little impatiently.

“‘Because I could not so
Be drest
As I were going to a feast,’”

replies she, with a faint flush. “I might perhaps have got the money to buy a new gown, if I had asked Dad for it, at the expense of his denying himself half a dozen of the little trivial things that go to make his life sweet. He would give me every penny he possesses; he would probably sell some of his dearest possessions—his books—to get me a few yards of muslin in which to pretend to enjoy myself for an hour or two. But do you think I should enjoy those two hours, knowing how they were procured? What a purgatory they would be!”

“They would indeed,” says Vyner, softly. He does

her full justice in this matter at least. He understands perfectly the loyalty of the affection that could find no happiness in a pleasure secured at the expense of one beloved.

"The boys are bother enough to him," she goes on, regretfully. "Why should I add to his worries? At this affair at the duchess's it will be different, as she has insisted upon giving all the dresses, and we are to wear our stage-costumes during the evening. But you now see"—with a wavering smile—"that I could not have gone to-night, though my very heart had been set upon it."

There is silence for a full minute; then Mr. Vyner, pushing back his chair with a rather ungovernable haste, rises to his feet.

"The scales of this world are too uneven, he says, in a low voice. "*One* has everything that he wants, and then wants everything, whilst others—have nothing—and—and there are those who would alter this injustice—yet dare not!"

He lifts his eyes to hers with an effort.

"No, they dare not," returns she, very distinctly.

"It seems past belief hard that, when you have so few enjoyments, you should be denied even one."

"This one would not have been an enjoyment. Console yourself with that thought. Even you"—with an expressive gesture and a smiling glance at the impromptu supper-table—"did not find it so."

"But any break in upon your monotony should count."

"Tut!" says she, shrugging her shoulders with the vehement half-foreign gesture she has inherited from

her mother. "Monotony is a thing for which we must all prepare ourselves.

"We dance like fairies in a ring, and
Our whole life is but a nauseous tautology.' "

"And now—good-night." She holds out her hand to him.

"Come with me at least as far as the hall door," entreats he.

Throwing wide the door when they come to it, they let in a flood of moonlight that brightens up the sombre hall and lies in a silver pathway across the gravel. The stars have come out even more brilliantly in the clear sky, and a soft wind buffets Audrey's cheeks as she steps into the pale porch hung with sleeping roses, whose perfume makes sweet the passing hour. A few thin luminous clouds crossing the horizon darken it momentarily; otherwise the tranquil expanse of heaven is undisturbed.

"I suppose I shall see you to-morrow at the castle about these rehearsals?" says Vyner, holding her hand.

"Who shall say?" returns she, stepping back from him and releasing her fingers,—

"To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow—
It is a period nowhere to be found,
Unless perchance in the fool's calendar.' "

She moves away from him, the moonlight following and catching amorously at the trailing folds of her soft gown. At the door, almost as she is lost in the enfolding darkness of the house beyond, she looks

back at him and waves her hand. One ray from Diana's throne, more venturous than the rest, falls into her liquid eyes as they turn slowly to where he still is standing on the gravel. Are there tears in them? Again she makes him that mute adieu, and then is gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

“But thine eyes are
As May skies are,
And thy words like spoken roses.”

“Sing while he may, man hath no long delight.”

SWINBURNE.

“AH! You, Dick?” says Dolores, with a little fond flush and a gesture of glad surprise. She has stepped through the armoury door that opens upon the western end of the garden, to find herself almost in her lover’s arms.

The sun, shining generously upon all things, is dancing attendance in quite a pointed fashion upon the soft cream-coloured folds of the Indian silk in which she has encased her dainty body, and is revelling in her sunny locks and in her happy innocent eyes.

Lace ruffles of an olden day come barely to her elbow; but long Suede gloves of a pale colour lie in pretty wrinkles upon her rounded arms. Of a hat she is guiltless, disdaining it in this glorious weather; but her lovely face looks up at him from under a cream-tinted umbrella that acts as an aureola round a face so pure, so calm, so sweet, as to be almost saint-like.

“Oh, love,” says Bouverie to himself, as he gazes mutely at her exceeding beauty, “what am I that I should have gained, not only your pure face, but your

heart that is even still more pure!" To make sound of the secret workings of our hearts is fortunately rare with most of us; so that what Dick really does say to Dolores has nothing whatever to do with the adoration for her of which his soul is full.

"You have guessed aright," returns he, gaily, taking and holding the little hand she so readily extends. "But why this blush, Miss Lorne, and why this suspicious confusion, and why this very fetching array? If I am in the way—if I am to come under the head of 'trumpery,' say so, and, whilst there is yet time, let me depart with my broken heart."

"I think I see you going—even then," says Miss Lorne, making him a contemptuous little *moue*. "But my gown—do you really like it? I—I—fancied you might come up this afternoon; and Lallie"—a little shyly—"says I look so nice in it that I thought I'd show it to you. But I didn't dream you would be here so early."

"You *should* have dreamt it, then; you should never dream of anything but me!"

"Perhaps I did not dream at all."

"A paltry way of getting out of it. Be it known to you, madam, that, according to some great thinkers, the brain is never idle; and so, in your sleeping moments, dreams of something or some one must have entered into it."

"But I wasn't asleep," drawing up her brows. "Now where does your argument go to—eh? Bah! What a goose you are!" All this she says with the most open and flagrant want of respect, and, having said it, she slips her hand into his, and rubs her soft cheek up and down in kittenish fashion against his sleeve.

"What a sweet day it is," she says, in a little sighing whisper, "and how happy I am!"

A passionate tenderness floods the young man's face.

"Really—*really?*" he whispers back to her. "I can then make you happy?"

"Dick," says she, with a sudden change of tone. Her smile fades; with a little clinging half-frightened gesture she slips her arms around him, "I hope I am not *too* happy," she sighs. "When people are too happy—what then?" She trembles.

"Nonsense!" exclaims he, rather roughly, but pressing her slender form very close to him. "No one is too happy. What ridiculous fancies you get into your head! And even if one were, why, one would go on being so, of course. And now let me look at your gown"—putting her a small way back from him. "How charming—how delicious! It is—yes it really is worthy even of you!"

"What a base flatterer!" protests she, recovering her spirits and laughing gaily. "And now tell me what brought you up here 'in the morning, oh, so early?'"

"I hardly know. I felt restless, unsettled, and as though I must see you once again. I thought a decent visiting-hour would never arrive that I might start for Greylands. Oh, for the time," exclaims Bouverie, drawing her hand through his arm as they walk along together through the scented beds of roses and giving it a loving squeeze out of the fulness of his heart, "when I need not go visiting you at all! When the longest journey from me to you will be from the stables or the library to your boudoir."

"Ah, I often think of that," says Dolores, with such sudden, sweet, genuine good faith that, regardless of consequences and the long line of windows, he stoops and kisses her upon the spot.

"How did you enjoy last night?" asks she.

It is the morning after Mrs. Drummond's ball.

"Altogether, when dancing with you; not at all otherwise. The whole affair was slow, I thought. It dragged; it wanted something."

"It wanted Audrey," says Dolores. "I missed her more than I can tell you."

"Did you? The rest of us missed Vyner. Where on earth did he disappear to? He never put in an appearance until twelve, and was no sooner come than gone. Mrs. Drummond was furious about it—at least, so Mrs. Wemyss told me—and so was 'my sweet girl'" (Mrs. Drummond's open-air name for her daughter).

"Dick," says Dolores, giving him the gentlest suspicion of a little pinch, "how dare you call any one 'sweet' but me? But what was Mr. Vyner's reason for his strange behaviour? He came up to me and spoke to me for a moment, looking very handsome but very cross, and——"

"Dolores," interrupts Dick, "how dare you call any one handsome but me! As to Vyner, I believe he was afraid Miss Drummond would do him the honour to propose to him."

"He doesn't seem to me to care for any one, does he?" asks Dolores, making her assertion with all the air of one who hopes and expects to be contradicted.

"No; Vyner is not a marrying man," assents Dick.

He is looking the other way, so does not notice the quick shade of disappointment that crosses the face of his little companion at his words. "Regular old bachelor, I should say! I couldn't imagine him writing sonnets to his mistress's eyebrow, for example, or otherwise playing the fool."

"Then you really think," murmurs Dolores, a little plaintively, "that, if a man honestly loves a woman, as—as—*you* say you love me, he must necessarily play the—the fool?"

"Now, once for all," says Mr. Bouverie, promptly, "let me lay down the law for you on this point—*our* law. You and I, to begin with, are altogether different from the rest of the world. If I choose to crawl in an abject fashion at your feet; to feel really obliged to you if you would trample upon me, to know the most intense inward gratification if you ask me to perform the smallest service for you—such as cutting my throat, or anything of that sort—if, in short, I feel it a finer thing to be your slave than any other woman's king: why, all that is not folly; it is merely what is fit and proper between you and me. But in anybody else it would be—— Well my judgment is not always sound, but I daresay it might be considered a little weak. But not in *me* remember, because you are you, and there is no one in all the world to be compared with you—see?"

"No, I don't see at all!" exclaims his paragon, with startling decision and a somewhat grievous note in her voice. "I never listened to such folly! And you must know I don't want you to crawl, Dick, just like a horrid worm, and that I wouldn't trample upon you for anything you could offer!"

"Well, never mind," says Bouverie, airily; "let us go on to the next paragraph. Did you ever see any one so in love as Bruno?"

"With Mrs. Wemyss? It is as apparent as the day! And I'm very——" She stops short and glances at him from under the huge umbrella. "Are *you* glad about it?" she asks, anxiously.

"If she will have him—yes, very!"

"Then so am I," declares Dolores, with an adorable smile and an air of deep relief. "And as to *having* him, I know she will! Her eyes! Did you ever watch her eyes when she is looking at Bruno and he doesn't know it?"

"I have better eyes than hers to watch," says Dick; "your eyes."

"Then you must be for ever looking in the glass," says she, with mock reproach—they have seated themselves upon a mossy mound and as she speaks she takes his chin into the hollow of her little palm and compels him to look at her—"because your eyes are mine now, and mine yours. Oh, you conceited boy! Out of your own mouth I condemn you."

She laughs a soft tuneful laugh, in which he joins.

"What book is that in your pocket?" asks Dolores, drawing it into fuller view as she speaks. "Swinnburne? Come, read something to me! You read well, and your voice is the sweetest in the world for me."

"It—it's not always easy to get a thing one likes out of him," says Mr. Bouverie, with mild confusion.

"Go on! Read me the first thing your eyes may light upon. Do you know I have never read any of his works, though I have read a great deal *of* him,

and know that the praise of him is unlimited. Go on."

She leans back lazily, and clasps her hands behind her sunny head.

"Well, but I hardly know what to choose," protests Bouverie, vaguely.

"I have told you. Open at hap-hazard, and begin at the very first line your eyes may meet."

With a mental reservation, Mr. Bouverie proceeds to obey her. There is comfort in the thought that he can let the book fall in the most carelessly accidental manner possible if his first glance at the printed page is not—er—that is—well, exactly to his liking. He opens the book, his eyes fall upon the page, he obeys her order, and reads from the first line they meet—

"The time of lovers is brief,
From the fair first joy to the grief
That tells when love is grown old,
From the warm wild kiss to the cold;
From the red to the white rose-leaf
They have but a season to seem
As rose-leaves lost on a stream,
That part not and pass not apart,
As a spirit from dream to dream,
As a sorrow from heart to heart.' "

He would have gone on; but a low sigh escaping from her stops him.

"The time of lovers is brief.' Is that true?" she asks. "*Must* it be true? Alas what a sad song you chose!"

"I did not choose it," exclaims he, earnestly. "I was to read the very first thing——"

"Yes, yes. And how unlucky!" says she dreamily. "Did he know? Will it be true in our case?"

"My darling, no! Dolores, look at me. Is it me you fear, or is it yourself? I shall not be flattered if it is the latter. My dear, dear heart, nothing shall part us, never—never! What! are you superstitious, you silly child, and depressed because of a few words that can have nothing to do with you or me?"

"It is foolish, isn't it?" she says, smiling languidly. "Yet I doubt the fulfilment—the continuance of my happiness; at times you know—*only* at times. There seems ever to be a cloud above me." She draws her breath quickly, and by a swift light action makes an expressive illustration of her meaning over her head. Then her little frail hands drop into her lap again—hands so frail that the many diamonds and pearls that cover them—his gifts—seem to weigh them down.

"I wish you were not so fragile," says Bouverie, paling a little. "If you were stronger, no such morbid thoughts would distress you. What a little hand! How warm it is—how listless! And how pale you are! You seem to me as unlasting as the dew."

"No, no! do not liken me to the dew," murmurs she, softly. "I should have to leave you then, and so soon—so soon! Why, what a little life you would give me!"

He has his arms round her, and, as she says this, she turns her face to his in caressing fashion. But there is something in her tone—her light words—that tortures him. He does not speak, but in a little agony of love and fear presses his lips to her pretty hair.

"No, I am like white violets. You remember? They are what you first told me I resembled. I will

not have your first fancy slighted, or changed." She pauses for a moment; and then, as though half unconsciously, the next words fall from her lips, "'Violets for a maiden dead.'"

"Dolores," exclaims he, sharply, putting her almost angrily from him and springing to his feet, "I forbid you to talk like that—do you hear?—I *forbid* you!"

"I was not talking," returns she, a little startled. "It was only a thought that came to me. But it shall be as you wish"—holding out her hands to him—"I shall never even think of that line again if I can prevent myself. Come back to me, Dick."

Of course he comes back to her; but there is still a great sadness in his face, born of vague fear and an undefined possibility too cruel to be brought into a more forcible light. Ever since his heart first woke to a knowledge of its love, his affection for her has been tinged with a nervous dread of something—intangible but terrible—that may arise to part him from her, or her from him. Even in small things he has found food to sustain this lover's torment. A sudden pallor arising from the extra sultriness of a summer day, and he would believe her dying; a little natural pretty languor, and his spirits died within him. There was indeed one day in which she had had a cold—a very slight cold, a mere trifling affair—when he told himself his heart was broken!

His love for this gentle, beautiful creature is an idolatry—keen and sweet, and redolent of all things pure. In her is centred every hope he has, every thought, every dream of a happy future.

"Your mind is still wandering away from me," she says presently, in a half-jealous tone, marking the

shade upon his brow. "Are you thinking"—looking at him with a sudden smile—"of my 'cloud,' my 'little rift?' I think of it too; but nothing comes of my thought. I don't know what it is. All my life I have lived with it; but"—with a comical gesture of despair—"I know less of it to-day than any one. It is not death—of that I am *sure*; but that is all."

"*Are* you?" asks Bouverie, in a low tone, his voice rather husky. "Can any one be sure? What—what did your mother die of—your father?"

"Of no disease that might fall upon me—nothing hereditary. Auntie has assured me of that, and auntie never lies. No, it will not be death; but sometimes it is borne in upon me that it may be—*grief*."

She pauses for a moment, and then, turning towards him with a sweet trust within her eyes, lays her hand on his.

"Since I have met you I have cared less for that thought," she says; "I shall have you to share it with me." Then suddenly another, a new fear seems to strike her; she turns pale. "But what if you could not share it?" she says.

"Well, then I should be out of the land of the living," returns he, cheerily, pressing the hand he holds to his lips. "Nothing but my final departure from this present world could prevent my sharing with you both your griefs and joys. What is my life for, unless it be to make yours happier?" Then he quotes a little tender verse to her very tenderly:—

"'Being your slave, what should I do but tend
Upon the hours and times of your desire?
I have no precious time at all to spend,
Nor services to do, till you require.'

But why worry yourself at all, my darling, about an unknown woe that may be—nay, that must be—purely imaginary?”

“It is not that,” she returns, slowly, shaking her head. “I have felt the shadow of it too long to disbelieve in it; yet I have never sought to solve its mystery. Why should I? Some day I shall know; but the farther off that day is the better. Come, let us forget it!” exclaims she, gaily, throwing up her charming head with a sudden pretty impatience that suggests a desire for freedom from unpleasing reflection. “There are moments when I cannot know discontent, and this is one of them. I have the glad sunshine, the long sweet day before me, and, above and beyond all, *you!*” She bends towards him impulsively, and gives him, of her own loving accord, a soft caress. “I am always happy on a sunny day like this. See,” cries she, suddenly, “look at that butterfly! What a beauty!”

She springs to her feet; all her late touch of languor, her pensive glances, have vanished; she is a careless child again, ignorant of secret care or sorrow.

“There he is,” she whispers, cautiously but hopefully, stealing towards the rose-bush whereon the child of the sun she has so fancied is resting with quivering wings. But, light as her footfall is, it startles the pretty winged trifter; and, spreading itself, it soars aloft, far, far, beyond her reach, and hurrying sunward—as it were “a flower that floats on air”—is soon lost even to sight. “How provoking!” cries she, with a gay laugh. “You saw how it eluded me? Ah, my hand has lost its cunning. There was a time—not so

long ago either—when I should have been as good as him, pretty little wretch! That was when I wore sun-bonnets; those great big muslin things, you know, like white coal-scuttles. But of late years I—— Well,” quickly, “it is not correct to run about so much when one is quite grown-up—is it now?”

She seats herself beside him once again, and pushes her fingers into his.

“Let me tell you your fortune,” she says, stooping to pluck a great-eyed marguerite growing at her feet.

“My future is told. I shall wed you, and live happy ever afterwards.”

“Perhaps you won’t,” retorts she, wilfully. “Well, let us see—this year—next——”

He lays his hand over the flower.

“See if you love me first. How could there be any true fortune unless there was love in it?” he protests, reproachfully.

“I forgot,” murmurs she. “Our love seems so sure, so certain a thing that—— Now attend.” She goes through the old-world formula. “‘She loves you—a little, indifferently, passionately—not at all,’” plucking carefully leaf by leaf the doomed marguerite as all true lovers have done before her time out of mind. It stops at “She loves you.”

“And that is the best of all,” she assures him, with a little nod. “If I love you, as you know I do, it means everything. Good little flower! Now I shall put you through your facings, Dick, and see if all your loving oaths are true, or if perchance you have ‘protested too much.’”

But the second flower is faithful as the first, and

gives its last petal to the selfsame words that ended the life of its comrade.

"Is not that charming?" laughs Dolores, her eyes gleaming with real pleasure. "Who shall say there is no truth in these things? Bah! They are sceptics who have no right to breathe the air with us. And was not this poor flower—after all, I am sorry I killed it!—even more worthy than its predecessor? It might have been a proud flower disinclined to follow another's lead; yet, you see, it conquered its pride, overcame its inclinations, and, like a good Christian, adhered strictly to the truth."

"It is my turn now," declares Bouverie, gaily, plucking another flower. "I shall see when we shall be married. If it doesn't say this year, I shan't believe in that strict adherence to the truth of which you have been boasting."

"You must believe what it tells you," says Dolores, leaning over his shoulder to watch his manipulation of the flower and see that there is no foul play. "Go on!"

"'This year, next year, three years—never!'"

They both grow rather anxious as the last petals are approached, and, when they cease upon the fatal "never," they are silent, and for a moment refuse to look at each other.

"It is all nonsense," exclaims Bouverie at last, flinging the stalk from him with an angry movement, "utterly insane rubbish! Let us try it again, if only to prove the absurdity of it."

"No, no," staying his hand. "If, as you say, it is nonsense, why try to prove it so? Of course there is nothing in it—and yet——"

"Well—what?" demands he, defiantly.

"Perhaps it did tell us the truth—perhaps we never shall be married? Who can tell what lies before us?"

"A long life together," declares he, stoutly. "Little raven that you are, I will not listen to your croaking! And, as for those marguerites, I shall hate them for ever and ever!"

"Even though they whispered to you of my love?" reminds she, gently. "Poor things! I requited them but ill—to give me pleasant tidings they died!"

"Was their last message, then, so pleasant?" asks he, with a short laugh. "Pshaw! Why take the trouble to even think of it?"

"Still, I wish it had said something else—even that long three years." She turns her eyes upon him with a little troubled glance in their soft depths. "Sometimes foolish things, like these marguerites, do truly foretell the future by a mere silly chance, as it were. What if we *should* be parted? What if"—with a very sad and wistful attempt at a smile—"that 'little rift' of mine should be the means of——"

"Dolores, *Dolores*," cries he, losing all self-control, "can you really love me and talk thus coldly of even an impossible parting? The very word means death to me! What should I do without you? In all this wide world where should I find me a place? I tell you that heart and soul I am so wrapped up in you that there could be for me, without you, no such thing as existence. Without you!" he repeats his own words with such a mournful cadence and in such despairing tones that involuntarily she draws nearer and throws her arms round his neck. "What words!" he says, in

a low tone. "But they have no meaning—*none!*" He presses her more closely to his heart. "Darling—my beloved," he whispers, "say once again that you love me! Let me hear you say it!"

"I love you!" returns she, with an intensity that satisfies him.

They cling to each other in silence. Is there some faint touch of despair in that mute embrace? No word escapes them. From across the far lawn there comes the sighing of the chestnut leaves, and in the scented wind are subtle whispers that no man may learn, but that all sad hearts must feel. Over everything lies the odorous breath of the dying roses.

CHAPTER XV.

“In yesterday’s reach and to-morrow’s
Out of sight as they lie of to-day,
There have been and there yet shall be sorrows.”

“For the crown of our life as it closes
Is darkness, the print thereof dust.”

SWINBURNE.

TIME, the tyrant, rushing ever onwards, brings to us what was once “to-morrow,” but is now known by its new name of to-day. A day far spent, as already evening has come and gone and night is at hand.

A night fraught with many emotions—weal for some and woe for others, and change—and loss of that dear hope that makes our sad life glad.

It is the night set apart for the theatricals at the castle; perhaps most of the actors therein feel some natural nervousness as the hour draws nigh to cast them unfriended before the British public, as represented by the society of Deadmarsh and the surrounding country. For Dolores, however, the hour has no terror. Standing before the mirror in which her charming image is depicted, lost in a happy reverie in which Dick alone has place, she is hopefully wondering whether he will be pleased with her costumes, and if indeed in this present one she will seem good in his sight. In many ways she is still but a child, and the longing to seem fair to her lover is a very

paramount feeling with her. No part has been assigned her in the play that is to open the proceedings at the castle; but she is to appear in the tableaux later on in some character unknown to all save those who are behind the scenes. Even to her aunt—Miss Maturin—she has been forbidden to reveal the secrets that are to be kept sacred until the night of representation.

It is a very charming reflection that meets her gaze as she glances thoughtfully into the mirror—fair shining eyes and pretty yellow locks and small mouth soft and sensitive, lovely dimpled arms bare to the shoulder, and a throat of marvellous beauty. She seems to rise out of the white lace that enshrouds her like a very dream of rapturous childhood hardly as yet awakened to a knowledge of the world's storm. A string of priceless pearls encircles her neck, her only ornament, save the diamonds that flash upon her little snowy hands. There is glad expectancy in her glance and in the smile that curves her lips, this smile widening with some happy thought of him who fills her being; her lips part, and suddenly, with a suspicion of coquettish shyness most sweet to see, she covers her face with her hands.

“There is no touch of sun or fallen rain
That ever fell on a more gracious thing.”

“Hah, conceited baby! At last I have caught you,” exclaims Miss Maturin, entering her room, “standing in an entranced attitude before your glass. And indeed”—with loving admiration—“no wonder! Darling child! That gown suits you *so*! You look just like a picture.”

“Of what? Prosperity?” asks Dolores, with a laugh

full of amusement, as she remembers how she will have to enact the other side of the picture very shortly. But that is a secret known only to her and the duchess and a very select few.

"No, no; as—— But I must not make you vainer than you are. By-the-by, would it not have been better to dress at the castle, as you must change this gown for the mysterious garments that are to astound me later on?"

"Well, I thought of that; but, you see, as I am not to be in the first part of the entertainment, and, as Audrey is acting, I thought I should like to see it. And—and Dick"—with a sweet shy blush—"would be there too, and I thought I should like to look nice when *first* he meets me."

"Reasons 'as plenty as blackberries,'" quotes Miss Maturin, gaily; "but the last is *the* reason—eh? However, that is neither here nor there. 'I would give no man a reason upon compulsion,' if I were you. Well, it is as pretty a gown as ever I saw. That woman is a jewel. Nothing like getting one's things from a good place, after all. 'A good place—a good price!' cry some. 'But, tut—nonsense!' cry I. 'What does a penny or two matter more or less, so long as one is pleased?' Dearest heart, you are as sweet a thing as ever eye did rest upon!"

"You think *he* will like me—that is, *it?*" asks Dick's betrothed, with an anxious air and a conspicuous blush, and an elaborate gesture towards her gown.

"If he doesn't, he ought to be ashamed of himself. But even the doubt wrongs him." Then she grows silent, and the fond appreciation of the beautiful girl

before her dies from her eyes, and she seems lost in a painful reverie. "So long ago it seems," she says, "and yet to-night it is so near! Just in such a gown I have seen *her* with those very pearls around her neck! I am thinking of your mother, child—your counterpart, and all the past rises within my heart and fills me with dread."

"With dread, auntie?"

"Ay, child! Has any one lived a lifetime to find no dread in their past? But"—hastily—"half my fears are imaginary, as they always were. Let us forget them."

"I am like my mother, then?" asks Dolores, looking at herself once more very earnestly in the long mirror.

"Strangely like. Yet I think I never noticed the resemblance so much before. What is it"—impatiently—"that brings back to me the past to-night with such terrible vividness? I seem to hear and feel and see as though it were before me—all that should be forgotten. Is it a presentiment of evil?" Then seeing the girl's rapt inquiring look, she checks herself by a strong effort and sinks into a chair. "Tut! What a brain I have!" she says with a light laugh. "Does it ever rest, I wonder? Come, darling; the carriage will be round soon. Come to the library, and have some tea before starting."

"In a moment, when I have taken you to pieces," says Dolores, saucily. "Personal remarks, I have always been told, are rude, and such remarks you have made freely about *my* appearance. Now it is your turn; get up at once, Miss Maturin, and let me see

the faults in your apparel. None! Positively *none!* Lallie, you are all my fancy paints you, and more."

"There isn't a bit of paint," protests Miss Maturin, mildly, "not a bit. A little powder I confess to—but of paint—nothing."

"That old lace is a thing to dream of; and that cap is an inspiration. Cap! the word doesn't convey the meaning of such a delicacy. I wish I could count as many years as you, that I might wear just such lace as that, and meanly ape at age in a lovely mob cap. Do you know," says Miss Lorne, impressively, "I'm awfully glad *you* are my auntie and no other. I should so hate to walk into a room with an old dowdy."

"But if I were an old dowdy, you would still be——"

"That is nonsense"—briskly—"and I shouldn't! For this reason, that if you were a dowdy, you wouldn't be my Lallie, and I *suppose*"—severely—"you don't want me to love any one as I love you and Dick."

This extraordinary speech is so unanswerable, that Miss Maturin wisely refrains from further argument, and is recompensed for her forbearance by a loving kiss from her tyrant.

"That is the reward of merit," says Miss Lorne, "for looking so charming to-night. There is nobody so handsome as you, Lallie."

"Isn't there?" says Miss Maturin. She smiles. Then some little bitter thought, unworthy of her, rises within her heart, and comes to her lips and passes them.

"What! not even Lady Bouverie, or Mrs. Wemyss, or any of your new friends?" she asks. Having made this absurd little remark, she is very properly ashamed

of herself, and declines to meet Dolores' eyes. But Dolores is not to be thus baffled. Placing her hands beneath her aunt's chin, she turns her face deliberately to the light and examines it with a critical and most impartial judgment.

"I do believe you are *jealous*," she says, at last, in a tone of withering scorn, largely mingled with incredulous surprise. "Jealous! Yes! It is no use your shaking your wicked head at me—jealous is the word. Don't deny it—I can see it written in every line of your expressive features. Oh, you naughty child! What is to be done with you? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Well," returns Miss Maturin, looking as confused as if she was only Dolores' own age, and was just caught in the act of committing a punishable fault—"I *have* thought of late, that somehow you were fading away from me—ceasing to be my very own—growing too occupied with your neighbours to leave room in your heart (at least so big a room as of old) for me."

"I have a great mind to put you in the corner and leave you there, and go to the castle without you." Then she breaks into merry laughter. "I shall let you into a secret," she says, "so far as one of your rivals is concerned. I—I can't *bear* Lady Bouverie! Whenever I see her I decide at once that life is *not* worth living. She frightens me. I am honestly afraid of her, though I don't exactly know why, but I always think I shall—some day. Whereas you, Lallie! Fancy my being afraid of you! And you know what fear does—it casts out love. No, I could not love Lady Bouverie."

"It does not," says Miss Maturin, with sudden

promptitude. "*There* you are utterly wrong! I adore you (as you unfortunately know), but I am in abject fear of you all the same. Come, come, cloak yourself, lazy one, or the duchess will think you a defaulter."

* * * * *

Brilliant lights, brilliant costumes, and music more brilliant than all the rest. The curtain has not yet ascended, and all are sitting in eager anticipation of a good laugh at the expense of their friends. This is the proper spirit in which to prepare yourself for private theatricals. There is a very orthodox curtain at the lower end of the hall, behind which an impromptu but very real stage has been erected. There is a row of foot-lights that would not have disgraced the Gaiety; "properties" to any amount all of the most correct, and a real live manager! If the acting is to be as perfect as the arrangements, every one feels it will be very disappointing indeed!

But of the acting (with one exception) I shall say nothing. Imagine it as you will. We have all been the sorrowful witnesses of our friends' efforts in this direction, and know by sad experience that amateurs are a wearying of the flesh. There is the "dainty one" who trips and minces it across the stage to the discomfiture of her fellow-actors, and refuses utterly to speak in an intelligible tone lest her voice should lose its softness—who smiles impartially through her griefs and woes to show her pearly teeth, and who, if she *must* faint, does it with a careful regard for the picturesque, and an utter disregard for the truth! Then there is the "self-possessed one," who struts the stage as though it were a wine-press or a prison-cell;

and yells all her sentences, and turns her laugh into a defiant snort, and makes quite a point of dropping into a dead silence every now and then (at the most damning moments so far as the success of the play is concerned), to draw her train leisurely aside, or to open her fan with a slow and languid sweep just to show the audience how collected she is, and that it is not the first time *she* has exhibited her undoubted talent to an admiring crowd! Alas! nor the *last*, either!

And then there is the "nervous one," who perhaps on the whole is the most trying of all, though he or she does not create within us those murderous feelings that animate us when the others are upon the boards.

The theatricals at the castle are like all the rest, neither better nor worse, with one great, nay, startling exception. It is given to Audrey Ponsonby to positively electrify her audience by a display of histrionic talent that, with culture, might make her fortune on the stage, and is only too good for a private performance.

From first to last she is the one person who claims and holds a hushed and undivided attention. Her beauty alone—undisputed as it is—would not suffice for this; it is the absolute force and passion of her acting that carries them all before it. She is superb, unrivalled; there is a touch of insolence about her face that accords well with the character chosen, and lifts her far above all her compeers.

Some old play was selected, after all, in which kings and queens and all the mightiest of the earth hold chief parts, and Audrey, in her white-and-gold draperies, that seem to cling to her and make one

with her slender, exquisite shape, looks like a queen indeed, with a golden crown upon her head and gold chains hanging from her gemmed girdle, and all her beautiful hair let loose to hang far below her waist in a waving, glittering mass.

There is a restless fire in her eyes and a strange pallor on her cheeks. She enacts her part—almost indeed creating it—with a *verve*, a passion, for which no one there is at all prepared. Some are subdued, some a little shocked, all are fascinated. A more utter transformation than has taken place in her could hardly be conceived. The girl, so haughty and reserved in ordinary life, has for once thrown aside all constraint, and is in turns a fond, impassioned woman, a queen stern and offended, a being made meek by love's power, made mad by jealousy! She holds every brain captive whilst she stands upon the mimic stage.

And now it is all over, and, glad, radiant, she passes away from the plaudits that still follow her, her bare lovely arms filled with flowers.

"To praise is almost an impertinence in this case," says Vyner, going forward to meet her as she enters the green room. "Yet I must speak or die. You were perfection—that rarest of all things. Let me congratulate you."

"Was Dad looking at me? Had he a good place? Was he pleased?" asks she, hurriedly, ignoring his words as though they are unheard, and speaking with an intensity of longing that betokens her desire to get affirmations to all her questions. Plainly her whole soul is in them.

"Yes; he could see you. And he was pleased, I

know. Once, when you were more than usually pathetic, I saw tears in his eyes."

"*Dear Dad!*" says the girl, pressing her flowers to her bosom, and whispering his name very softly. "He taught me my part," she says, looking up at Vyner. "I used to say it over and over again to him every morning. Such trouble as he took with me! But now I hope"—smiling—"he thinks this last pupil of his has not disgraced him. Did I really get through it well? What did—*you* think of me?"

The excitement of her success, the warmth of the applause, is still with her. She has not yet gone back again to the old reserve. There is a distinct touch of coquetry in her beautiful eyes as she half lifts them to his and glances at him from under her long lashes.

"For years I have been trying to answer that question satisfactorily to myself without the faintest result," replies Vyner, slowly. "And, as for to-night, when one has fallen beneath the spell of an enchantress, where is the time for any serious reflection? Thought was beyond me! I could only sit still and humbly admire."

"Never saw anything like it in all my life," says Sir Chicksy, rushing up to the heroine of the hour with flushed cheeks and a general incoherency.

A feeble part in the play had been assigned him, so that now he has of course the run of the green-room. It was a very feeble part indeed, but such as it was it had proved too much for Sir Chicksy. It routed him with great slaughter, and left him without the power of beating even an ignominious retreat. A servant he was supposed to be (a "minion" I believe

they called him), and all he had to do was to cross the stage from L. to R. and say,—

“My lord, the barges wait.”

But he had made quite a remarkable thing of it! When he fell over the queen’s train and only recovered himself by knocking off the king’s wig, people merely laughed and said it was “quite too awfully comic,” but when he said, “My bord, the larges wait,” nobody laughed, and every one wanted to know whether it was Greek he spoke, or Hindustanee, or very old English!

“Never saw such acting,—never, I give you my word,” he is saying now, gazing at Audrey with wild enthusiasm in his eye, and a ferocious grin born of his noble determination to keep *the* eye-glass in his left orb. “Talk of Mary Anderson, an’ Ellen Terry, an’ an’—the lot of ’em! Not to be named in the same day with you! You’d lick ’em all to fits! Eh, Vyner?”

“I hope not, my dear fellow. I think you wrong Miss Ponsonby. She would not, I am convinced, hurt a fly; and besides, corporal punishment would not be considered——”

He is interrupted by a young man who comes eagerly up to Miss Ponsonby. He is still in a costume belonging to some dead century, and has therefore been one of her fellow-actors. He is a good-looking young man of the “curled darling” type—a captain in a cavalry regiment and a guest at the castle. He is, too, decidedly *épris* with Miss Ponsonby, as any one who runs may read.

“Ah! what should we have done without you!” exclaims he, fervently, gazing with undisguised admiration at the white-and-gold beauty before him. “You

made the play. You were magnificent. Our rehearsals gave me no idea of your power. But you must be awfully done up. Let me get you something—champagne? claret cup? And let me take away these tributes to your charms.”

He points to the flowers she still holds in her white arms.

“‘*Embarras de richesses*,’” murmurs Vyner, with a slight shrug. His words may be meant for her flowers, or her admirers, or anything. “Let me relieve you of some of them.”

Whereupon he takes himself and the flowers away.

“Where is Mrs. Wemyss?” calls somebody, rushing frantically through the room. “Seen her anywhere, any one? She’s wanted for the first tableau; they are all arranged, only waiting for her.”

“She was here with Bouverie a moment ago. Try the little ante-room beyond.”

The little ante-room beyond, being tried, yields up its treasures. Mrs. Wemyss, gliding out from it into the more brilliant room outside in a quaint but seductive costume of crimson and gold and literally hung with sequins, asks in the mildest of tones if any one is looking for *her*, and is instantly captured and carried off by the frantic young man to be posed in the coming tableau.

There are only four or five tableaux in all, put on as little bits of light and colouring, seen through a gauze mist, to finish off the play; pictures to represent in living form some already seen upon canvas, but which—more fortunate than we frail mortals—will live for ever. They are all exquisitely arranged—a celebrated R. A., a friend of her Grace, having taken

them in hand—and are all exquisitely portrayed. But with one alone we have to do.

As the velvet curtains part, and Dolores, in a gilt frame, stands revealed in all her sad beauty, a thrill of delight runs through the audience. To many of them she is unknown, and to them the sweetness of her is a revelation.

But through Miss Maturin there runs a shiver of unexpressed agony. She sinks back in her seat, as though she would well escape from the vision before her, and at last a few incoherent words are forced from her.

“Oh, no,” she murmurs, indistinctly, almost unconsciously; “they should not have given her such a part as that—no, not *that!*”

Her voice, subdued though it is, is miserable, and strikes upon Mr. Vyner’s ear, who happens to be her nearest neighbour. Glancing at her, he notices how thoroughly unstrung she looks, and what an ashen pallor has overspread her face; and, with a desire for a more minute criticism, he returns his gaze to the representation before him.

Dolores as “Adversity!” Alas, how the character suits her! It seems as though the feeling of it has sunk into her very soul, so sadly resigned she looks, so replete with gentle melancholy. Leaning against a wall, with her mournful eyes looking straight before her into a possibly happy past now gone for ever, with one soft arm upraised and a pale bunch of flowers in the small clinging fingers, with a divine resignation upon her perfect face, she appears before them all, more sweet, more sorrowful than words can tell.

"It is horrible!" mutters Miss Maturin, through her pale lips.

"A mere bit of exceedingly pretty acting, after all," says Vyner, cheerfully. "Dear me! How wonderfully well she looks the part! Rather spoils the effect to think how she will be laughing over it in a minute or two—eh?"

He feels a strange tenderness towards the woman beside him as he notes her distress, and tells himself how she cannot endure even in imagination to see her darling so distressed.

"Yes, yes, no doubt!" says Miss Maturin, recovering herself with an effort. "It is only that I cannot bear to see her look like that."

She draws a heavy breath, and turns her head with a smile that is almost tragic to her companion. This change of position brings her glance towards the other side of the room. She lifts her eyes——

And then all at once she is unaware of Vyner's vicinity. The very walls of the room seem to fade away from her; the mists of twenty years are pushed aside; there is nothing now in reality but the earnest piercing gaze of two dark eyes.

The owner of them bows to her. Afterwards it seems impossible to her; but in truth she does return the salute. How many years have come and gone since last she and this stranger—who still is not strange—thus gazed at each other, and to what a time his presence carries her back—to what miserable hours, what moments fraught with shame! Once in that terrible past this man had lived in the old village where her home had been, where she and her sister had dwelt.

Great Heaven! how it all comes back! First the happy, quiet, quaint old days, with no disturbing element, with no griefs, if no great joys, in them—days perhaps now the bitterest of all to dwell upon; and then the break-up of the calm household; her flight into Egypt, as it were, and her fond *vain* hopes that all who knew of her or hers then, might haply be dead ere her return to England; and, lastly, the return, and with it now the discovery that, after seventeen long years of silence and growing blessed forgetfulness, one lives who is here smiling at her, *remembering* as he smiles no doubt, and ready to betray.

Oh, the cruelty of it! the bitter cruelty of it! to escape for so long, to be at last undone! Like the lost spirits in the shade, she has been for ever grasping after the waters of oblivion, and, like them, her eager hands have failed to seize them.

And still Dolores stands there a too perfect “Adversity,” a thing most beautiful; but to her, Miss Maturin, positively repellant. How has the girl caught that mournful expression? Is it only acting, or is it real—the faint growing shadow of what will one day rest upon her face for ever? A desire to rise and cry aloud to her, to *command her* to cast from her this miserable counterfeit of a grief that yet may touch her, almost overcomes Miss Maturin.

She conquers herself, however; but, oh, the relief of it when the curtains close and the pretty drooping figure and sad face are hidden away behind it, and she can lean back on her chair and lose herself in a semi-insensibility that yet is not strong enough to altogether kill the terrible thrilling sense of pain that runs all through it.

The other tableaux are unseen by her, although her open eyes appear to rest upon them. She is hardly awake to anything going on around her, until two soft hands are laid upon her shoulders, and Dolores, clad once more in her clinging lace gown, stoops over her with a little low happy laugh.

"So far, so good," she says, merrily. "Business first, you know, and pleasure afterwards. Business is at an end, and now for the other thing. Well, Lallie, and what did you think of your lovely niece to-night?"

She laughs again saucily, and pats Miss Maturin's shoulder.

"Did I look sufficiently forlorn?" she asks, gaily.

"It was horrible!" says Miss Maturin, huskily. "You must never do it again, child—never! Do you hear?"

"Why, my success, then, has been a genuine one!" exclaims Dolores, with a bright laugh. "I have positively impressed you."

"You are really happy, darling?" asks Miss Maturin, with curious irrelevance, tightening her hand convulsively upon the girl's fingers—"quite happy? There is nothing—no thought or fear of coming evil—no——"

"Now, you *know* I warned you about the curried lobster," says Dolores, in a tone of mournful reproach. "It *always* makes you uncomfortable and drags you down to the very lowest depths of despair. I shall forbid cook to have it again until you can summon courage to reject it, or at least give me your word of honour to take only *one* help and that of the most meagre description."

"I don't think it is the lobster," says Miss Maturin, feebly. "But answer me," eagerly. "You *are* happy?"

"It is my belief," says Dolores, severely, "that in your present frame of mind you will be intensely disgusted if I give you 'yes' for an answer! And so to punish you for your degrading passion for sea monsters I shall say it. *Yes*. There! already I can see the grey shade of disappointment creeping over your ingenuous countenance. Really though, Lallie," turning her little hand, palm upwards, within Miss Maturin's and giving hers a loving squeeze, "I never felt so sure of being happy as I do to-night. The very sweetest luck will attend me—all good sprites are near me; I feel it—I *know* it!"

She turns a radiant glance upon her aunt, and a laugh of pure youth and enjoyment issues from her lips.

"Ah, Mr. Vyner," she cries, catching sight of him—"you again! When is the dancing to commence?"

"Almost directly. They are giving a few minutes to Lady Gertrude to change her dress; she was in the last tableau. How d'ye do, Mrs. Drummond? Charming affair all through, wasn't it?"

"I am not a judge, perhaps," says Mrs. Drummond, solemnly, who, with her friend and rather doubtfully Mrs. Dovedale, has drawn close to where he is standing; "but to my eyes the—the exhibition of to-night was extremely painful."

"You forgot your glasses?" asks Vyner, a little uncertainly perhaps, but with unquestionable politeness and the gentlest regret.

"It was no question of glasses," says Mrs. Drummond, reddening rather furiously. "I can see per-

fectly, Mr. Vyner, without the aid of art—a fact I never had reason to deplore until to-night.”

“You mean to tell me that something occurred sufficiently distressing to make you wish yourself blind?”

“Perhaps that is putting it a little strongly,” objects Mrs. Drummond; “but this much I can say, that, when I find myself forced to witness the forward conduct of—of people with whom I am on speaking terms, and of whom I would wish to have a better opinion, I confess it both shocks and grieves me.”

“*People!*” echoes Mr. Vyner, anxiously. “How many of them? Have the whole lot of us sunk in your esteem? Must I too consider myself undone? ‘Forward,’ did you say? Oh, I *hope* I wasn’t ‘forward!’”

“When the word ‘people’ escaped me, I spoke unadvisedly,” corrects Mrs. Drummond, still on the solemn tack; “though it was through a kindly desire to shield one whom we all know that I used it. But sometimes kindness is mistaken. Had I given utterance to the word ‘person,’ I should have been nearer my real meaning.”

“Oh, yes, much nearer!” murmurs Mrs. Dovedale, sweetly.

“Bless me, this is terrible!” exclaims Vyner. “I had no idea Lady Gertrude had so offended against good taste as to convey to her audience the impression of being bold and forward! ‘Forward?’ Yes; that was the word, I think. I am sure, Mrs. Drummond, were the duchess to hear you disapproved of her daughter’s conduct, she would be——”

"Grossly offended—with Lady Gertrude," puts in Mrs. Dovedale, mildly, from behind her fan.

"Oh, pray hush!" entreats Mrs. Drummond, looking fearfully around her—Mr. Vyner's tone has been in no wise subdued. "How could you imagine I was alluding to dear Lady Gertrude, who is in all respects what a gentlewoman should be? No; I was speaking of Miss Ponsonby. Her dress, her unmaidenly attitudes, her evident and very distressing craving for admiration, her boldness and effrontery, all pained me to the last degree!"

"We could all see that," murmurs her friend, in her soft, childish treble. "We all noticed your open distress and your brave efforts to conceal it—efforts so great as to make you look at times *almost* out of temper. You see how one suffers for one's good actions! But then, fortunately, we all *know* you," says Mrs. Dovedale, with a sweet little caressing smile, "and *exactly* how you felt."

"How grieved Miss Ponsonby would be were she to hear this!" exclaims Vyner, pathetically. "Your opinion, Mrs. Drummond, weighs with her so much that an adverse word from you would, I think, cause her to feel despair!"

The concern upon his face is deep and earnest, yet Mrs. Dovedale's infantile glance, turning quickly upon him, grows sharp.

"I am sure you agree with all I have said," goes on Mrs. Drummond, heavily, "you, who so well know what a true lady should be," here she casts a speaking glance at a distant corner, where stands the florid and somewhat under-dressed Georgina, "cannot fail to understand my sentiments."

"I do indeed fully understand them," says Vyner, sympathetically.

"And then that undisguised flirtation with Captain Greville!" continues Mrs. Drummond, warming to her work, and turning up her eyes to the ceiling with quite a lamentable display of pious grief. Now or never, she decides hurriedly, is the time given her to put an end for ever to Audrey's interference with her plan of making Georgina Mrs. Vyner. Now or never! She braces herself afresh. "Ah, how immodest, how self-confident was that wretched girl's conduct all this evening! I am sure I most sincerely pity poor Lady Bouverie!"

"Anything wrong with her?" asks Vyner, changing his glass from one eye to the other, and regarding Mrs. Drummond with what seems to her like growing anxiety.

"*Everything*, when she is compelled to own that girl as her niece. There is nothing in such bad taste as a flirtation carried on before the eyes of the world."

"You would recommend one, then, carried on behind its back? Oh, fie, Mrs. Drummond," exclaims Vyner, lightly, "such sentiments from you! Does Miss Drummond share them?"

"You at least, I think, understand my sweet girl," says "the sweet girl's" mother, with gentle reproach. "She indeed possesses a soul that lifts her far above all such sad frivolities. To trifle with a human heart is out of her power."

"Oh, quite!" acquiesces little Mrs. Dovedale, with enthusiasm. "To enslave a man, to keep him chained to her side for an entire evening, as others can, is a thing she *could not do!*"

"And so you think Miss Ponsonby is trying to break young Greville's heart?" asks Vyner, laughing.

"I have no doubt she is trying to entrap the infatuated young man into a marriage," returns Mrs. Drummond, spitefully. "He is heir to a baronetcy, and is an excellent *parti* in every way. Her open encouragement is shameful!"

"They have been together a good deal, certainly," hesitates Mrs. Dovedale, mildly; "but I was standing near them for a long time, and their conversation was entirely about the play and the costumes."

"That is really nothing," says Vyner, with a genial smile. "I once knew a fellow who was talking to a girl about asparagus, when suddenly he turned and proposed to her. So, you see, you never can tell."

"Well, to me it is a most melancholy spectacle to see a young woman evince such an ardent desire for adulation," sighs Mrs. Drummond, with marked Christianity. She looks quite sorry for the benighted object of her remarks. Thus she lays a thin coating of religious veneer over the raging vindictiveness beneath. "Now, Georgina is so different," she says.

"True, true," agrees Vyner, eagerly, with a tender glance at the distant fair one. "I could hardly imagine any two people so utterly dissimilar."

Again Mrs. Dovedale looks at him.

"Yes, I have many things for which to be grateful," says Mrs. Drummond, meekly. "My Georgina is so gentle, so retiring; she claims nothing; she does not put herself forward in any way. Her very dearest desires she leaves for *time* to grant."

"She does indeed leave much to be desired," says Vyner, with a smile so affectionate, so almost filial, as

to allay the suspicions that this extraordinary speech has very naturally aroused in the breast of Mrs. Drummond.

But Mrs. Dovedale's innocent lips widen, and her eyes light up marvellously.

"What a funny little speech!" she says, artlessly; and she makes a mental note of the "funny speech," to be retailed again by-and-by to her friend with kindly comments thereupon.

"I am so glad, dear Mr. Vyner, to find you agree with me in my estimate of Miss Ponsonby," says Mrs. Drummond, pleasantly. "A fast girl is my abhorrence."

"Ah, here comes your abhorrence," exclaims Vyner, cheerfully, as Audrey, a lovely creature in her white-and-gold draperies, sweeps slowly up to them.

Mrs. Drummond starts perceptibly; her colour changes, and she tries with a violent effort to bring the ghastly semblance of a smile to her lips. After all, this objectionable girl is Lady Bouverie's niece, and it will not do to offend her hopelessly. She smiles therefore, and puts out her hand, which Audrey manages not to see, acknowledging her presence only by a bow as coldly graceful as it is disdainful.

Mrs. Drummond, discouraged, falls back a little; but Mrs. Dovedale, who is all smiles and pretty glances, presses forward.

"I cannot tell you how you have charmed us all, Miss Ponsonby," she says, airily; "Mrs. Drummond especially. You really should have prepared us for such perfect work; you and Captain—Captain—ah, what is it?—I mean your lover, your"—with childish confusion—"your *stage* lover, of course—were infinitely

superior to all the rest of the actors. How stupid I am about remembering names!"—with a smile replete with covert insolence—"it takes me quite a long, long time to learn them."

"It takes some people a long, long time to learn anything," replies Audrey, with a pale smile equally insolent; "*even common manners!*"

She half lifts her drowsy lids, and regards the vicar's wife as one might a person of very inferior quality indeed. Mrs. Dovedale quails beneath that glance, and, with an affectation of seeking somebody, fades slowly away.

Then Audrey turns to Vyner.

"And so you spend your time," she says, with a contemptuous shrug of her white shoulders, "with such people as those! You find them amusing?"

"Intensely so! Mrs. Drummond more especially."

"One would, of course," says Audrey, curling her lip. "Was she giving you a list of Georgina's virtues?"

"Not all the time."

"Then she was giving you a list of my vices?"

"They tell one it is rash to contradict a woman twice," replies Vyner, calmly.

"Which means I guessed correctly. And you listened to her? You found such talk amusing?"

"Good, honest vituperation is interesting at all times; and, to do Georgina's mother justice, she *can* 'give the bastinado with her tongue.' Is that Mrs. Wemyss over there? What a charming laugh she has! Shall we join her?"

"As you will"—indifferently; then her whole face changes. "Ah, you, Captain Greville?" she says, smiling, and flushing faintly as she turns to Greville,

who has just come up to her with a programme in his hand.

"For you," he says, giving it to her. "And now for your trusty messenger's reward—the first waltz?"

She smiles an acquiescence.

"And the second—and——"

"Don't be greedy," interposes she, softly. "Let us put a full stop after the second—for the present at least. I am going now to speak to Mrs. Wemyss."

"Why, so I think am I," says Greville, laughing and accompanying her and Vyner, as they cross the room, to where Mrs. Wemyss, Bruno Bouverie, and a rather disconsolate Sir Chicksy are standing.

CHAPTER XVI.

“Cold eyelids that hide like a jewel
Hard eyes that grow soft for an hour.”

“Memory grey with many a flowerless year.”
SWINBURNE.

“WHAT a day we’re ’aving,” says Bruno, as they come up. “Audrey, my congratulations; though poor, they are sincere; but every one makes allowance for my intellectual defects.”

“Mrs. Drummond was delighted with you,” laughs Mrs. Wemyss, mischievously, giving Audrey’s hand a surreptitious squeeze. Perhaps she is the one woman in the world whom Audrey’s cold manner has never repelled. “Oh, the joy in the dear old lady’s eye when your success was assured, and when the Duke flung you that outrageous bouquet! Her smile was a perfect sunbeam!”

“So warm that it withered all around!” says Vyner.

“By-the-by, has any one seen the fair Georgina?” asks Bruno.

“I did. I caught a passing glimpse of her; but I was afraid to look again,” says Vyner, regretfully; “she had only as much clothing on as the law compels, and I am very shy!”

“She was with Bob Haverly,” puts in Sir Chicksy, in a moody tone. He was in a very low state indeed

before Audrey arrived with Captain Greville; but now he looks murderous.

"In default of a better," says Bruno. "Poor 'staggering Bob!' I hope he was sober."

"I hope he wasn't," says Vyner. "If slightly indistinct in views and manners, he would not so entirely realize the misery of the situation."

"Ah, true! After all, you are a better friend to him than I am. A discreet intoxication might help him through. A small matter, and really no trouble to *him*."

"Little things make up the sum of life," says Mrs. Wemyss, solemnly, upon which they all laugh. "There will be a flower, a kiss, a vacant seat, a temporary aberration like our poor Bob's; and there is no knowing what will come of it all."

"There is no knowing what will come of anything," groans Sir Chicksy from out the utmost gloom. This remarkable speech is so obscure as to call for no answer from any man.

"What is the matter with him?" asks Mrs. Wemyss, in a low voice, turning to Vyner. "He has been in quite a desperate state for the last hour. Was there ever so miserable a creature? It isn't toothache, or earache, or neuralgia, because I suggested them all and got three 'Noes' for answer, and not another syllable thrown in even for friendship's sake. What *can* it be?"

"It is Greville; 'the forward youth that *would* appear.' And what is friendship beside jealousy? A paltry shadow! Poor Sir Chicksy! If he has pinned his faith to Miss Ponsonby, I doubt there is trouble before him. However, 'sorrow may endure for a night,

but joy cometh in the morning!' that is a fair division, is it not? And, after all, one can't be always on the grin—at least, most of us can't. Few"—with a smile—"are as triumphant over their jars and frets as Bruno."

"'He hath, indeed, a merry note,'" quotes Mrs. Wemyss, smiling. It is a pleasant smile, warmed by a delicate blush.

"Ah, there go the fiddles!" exclaims Greville, turning eagerly to Audrey.

"Then there goes my last chance of happiness," says Vyner. "Now to approach my partner with the smiling face that hides the breaking heart. I've been trying not to see her for the last ten minutes; but I experienced a considerable difficulty in the effort since I discovered her whereabouts."

"Where is she?"

"Glaring at me from the opposite wall. See her? Big bony girl in the gridelin gown."

"What on earth did you do it for?" asks Bruno, in open amazement.

"Let in for it, of course. But I shan't forget my debt to her chaperon. Yet, after all, it might be worse; it might be Georgina."

"Miss Ponsonby," says Sir Chicksy, coming awkwardly to the front, "may I have the pleasure of this?"

"I am engaged for it, unfortunately."

"The next, then?"

"Is not a waltz. And I never dance anything else."

"The next waltz, then?"—desperately.

"Is promised also."

"Ah!" says poor Sir Chicksy, falling back dis-

couraged, and casting a withering glance at the successful Greville.

Perhaps Audrey feels for him; perhaps it is that she finds it impossible, like most women, to loosen her hold on a slave. At all events, she leans a little towards him, and beckons him once more to her side with a slight wave of her fan.

"Would the third be of any use to you?" she asks, coldly, but with one of her rare smiles. "Yes? Then take it. By-the-by"—with a sudden determination to strengthen his chains or else to show off her power to the others—"how is it that you, of all my acquaintances, have been the only one to give me no pretty compliment to-night?"

"I don't suppose anything I could say would be pretty," sighs Sir Chicksy, despondently.

"Try," says Vyner, the finest encouragement in his tone.

"I *have* tried"—gloomily—"and I might as well have let it alone. She forgets all about it. It's only natural she should, you know; I'm not one to be remembered. But, as it happens, I was one of the very first to congratulate her when she came off the stage."

"Ah, so you were!" acknowledges Audrey, lightly. "I forget now what it was you said; but I know you were very kind."

"Kind!" repeats the infatuated youth, with bitterest self-disdain. "Who am I that I should presume to be *kind* to you? I'm glad you have forgotten all about it. 'My words that would praise thee are impotent things.'"

"Good gracious, Chaucer! Recollect yourself!"

exclaims Bruno, giving him a warning nudge and a shocked glance. "However badly you may *feel*, learn to restrain yourself; and, at all events, never give way to bad language in public."

"Eh?" says Sir Chicksy, in a stupefied tone.

"To say '*impudent* things' to Miss Ponsonby! My dear fellow, what madness! I really can't see my way clear to the end of this sad affair."

"I didn't say that," exclaims Sir Chicksy, with wild wrath, growing more and more desperate as he sees his idol disappear in the distance with the more favoured Greville. "Nothing of the sort! The word I used was '*impotent*!'"

"*Very* impudent," persists Bouverie, gravely. "As Miss Ponsonby's near relative, I must ask you to withdraw it—to apologize—to——"

"Oh, go it!" cries Sir Chicksy, hysterically. "I'm not bad enough as it is, I suppose, that you must try to madden me! But I'll have satisfaction from somebody; I'll have it out of one of you for this! I'll have my revenge, or——"

Here his knee-joints coming in contact with the sharp edge of an ottoman, he perforce gives way and sinks upon it.

"A seat," says Bruno, finishing his sentence for him. "Well, it is the better thing of the two. Though how you presume to talk of vengeance is——"

"Bruno, be silent," interposes Mrs. Wemyss, in a low tone, but with authority. "You are really too bad. Let the poor boy alone. Between you all you will drive him out of his mind."

"His *what*?" asks Vyner, mildly.

"Have you forgotten, Mr. Vyner," says Mrs.

Wemyss, severely, "that your gaunt partner is awaiting you?"

"No; I was remembering it all the time," returns Mr. Vyner, sweetly. "I am helping her to a perfect frame of mind. To possess one's soul in patience is a rare merit. I think, however, she has now possessed it long enough in that state, and I fly to her."

"For me," says Bruno, "am I to understand that you forbid me speech? Am I to hear my own cousin cruelly insulted, and take no steps to punish the offender?"

"You are to cease teasing that boy."

"Very good; I shan't play any more," says Bruno, rising with an injured front. "And, for the future, Mrs. Wemyss, you will be kind enough to remember that we are not upon speaking terms."

"Oh, that I might dare to hope it!" exclaims she, laughing, and turning to seat herself beside the disconsolate baronet.

"Why so pale and wan, fond lover?" murmurs she, archly. "Anything the matter that I may hear?"

"Matter!" cries the poor fool, something that is *almost* an expression coming into his face. "Everything's the matter! It is all up with me and—and her! I don't mind about anything else; that ass Bouverie doesn't count with me. He *is* an ass, isn't he?"

"The greatest I know," says Mrs. Wemyss, with satisfactory emphasis, and in a tone mischievously distinct, Bouverie being within hearing distance, and of course listening to every word that may chance to fall from his "ladye's" lips, as a true lover should.

"But, oh, Mrs. Wemyss, how I love that peerless

creature!" goes on Sir Chicksy, tearfully. "And I'm nothin' to her—nothin'! Ah, there lies the sting! I'm less than the dust beneath her feet! I wish," cries Sir Chicksy, with a sudden burst of tragical sorrow, "that I *was* the dust beneath her feet! Anyhow, I could touch her then! I could cling to her shoe; an'—an' she'd have to carry me along with her wherever she went!"

There is a suspiciously smothered sound somewhere near; but when Mrs. Wemyss glances in its direction, Mr. Bouverie is to be seen plainly wrapped in happy thoughts of his own, and is bowing and smiling in a most affable manner to somebody in the far end of the room. It is a crowded end, and of course it would be impossible to single out the fortunate object of his attentions.

"Mr. Bouverie," says Mrs. Wemyss, with ominous mildness, "to-night's theatricals seem to have got into your head. When you have ceased to enact the part of a nodding mandarin to a purely imaginary audience, I shall be glad if you will take me to the next room."

* * * * *

Two hours are as nothing when one is young and engaged for every dance before the fiddlers have well got through their first dismal tuning. To Audrey, still flushed with her great triumph, they are as bare moments that fly by her, fraught with a gay intoxication.

She has laughed with a gaiety, a freedom from constraint strange to her. Born with a spirit unsuited to poverty, she has drifted year by year into a state of feeling, false and embittered, that has rendered most people distasteful, or, at the best, objects of suspicion in her eyes. Only her "Dad," her best-loved,

is entirely without fault within her sight. To-night, however, the unwonted excitement of an ensured success has lifted her above her lower nature. Her enjoyment of the passing hour is not forced; she enters into the spirit of it with an eagerness that would have surprised even herself, had she spared time to think of it, and that delighted her "Dad," who, dragged from his seclusion and his book to witness her triumph, has been more than rewarded by the smiles and blushes he has seen mantling upon her beautiful face.

She has perhaps danced rather more than is correct with Captain Greville, and has let the world see in a somewhat reckless manner how abject is his submission.

"My dance, I think," says Vyner, going up to her a little before supper.

"Is it?" She has been smiling prettily at Captain Greville the moment before; but, as she answers Vyner, her smile fades, and the old, tired, listless, discontented expression returns to her. "Let us not dance it, then. Is there no place where one can sit it out?"

"More than I need recount," replies Vyner, with a slight shrug. "Let me make you wise as to one of them."

"And so you have at last known happiness?" he says to her presently, when they are seated in a little flowered recess sweet with the perfume of dying daphnes. A coloured lamp, faintly lit, sheds a pale crimson glow above their heads.

"It has been a better evening than most," returns she, indifferently.

"Until *now*, you would say," retorts he, with a

short laugh. "Well, endure me for a while, if you can, if only for the sake of appearances."

"Appearances!"—she colours haughtily, and turns her gaze full upon him.

"You see," says Vyner, shaking from the gold of her gown a little crawling spider that has dropped from the leaves above her, and taking no notice of her question, "if admiration and conquest be happiness, you have gained it to-night."

"I am no happier than I was yesterday," returns she, coldly. "But you spoke of appearances just now. What was it you wished me to understand?"

"That it is not altogether well to dance for an entire evening with one man."

"You are as careful of my reputation as Lady Bouverie," says she, with a low scornful laugh. Then she shuts her fan suddenly with a sharp angry click, and throws it on the cushion beside her. "Did you notice her face when every one else was congratulating me?" she asks. "It was a picture! It told its own story. What malicious eyes she has! I wish she were not my father's sister, that I might dare to offer her insolence before which hers to me would sink into insignificance!"

She draws her breath quickly, and her lips part. There are, he thinks, tears in her dusky eyes; but her lashes fall and rise so swiftly that it is difficult to be sure.

"You exaggerate her feeling towards you."

"Her hatred, you would say. Is it not a strange thing that mere poverty should breed dislike? She cannot forgive Dad in that he was born without that lucky silver spoon. A man who must take in pupils

to help him to eke out his daily bread is a distressing acquaintance at all times, and to feel that man is her brother is gall and wormwood to her."

Her charming voice has grown impetuous, and is tinged with even a deeper shade of mockery than is usual to it.

"What a thing is poverty!" she says.

"A conquerable thing, however. You are now, I should say, in a fair way to escape its thralldom. Greville very properly has fallen in love with you."

"Has he?"

"Hasn't he? He seemed to me as miserable a while since as any woman could possibly desire."

"You must have been studying him very closely."

"There was no occasion for that. He wears his chains with a most engaging openness. I am so old a friend of yours that I suppose I may make myself disagreeable, and ask you any question I please? Tell me then—you mean to marry him?"

She hesitates. Her colour fades altogether, and she grows a little pale beneath his gaze.

"I may," she says, at last.

"You *may*? Surely you have given him cause to think you *will*?"

"Oh, I know what all that means!" exclaims she, impatiently, giving him an angry half-glance. "Are a few kind words and a smile or two equivalent to an acceptance of the handkerchief whenever my lord, after due deliberation, may choose to throw it? It is all too absurd. One is called a coquette if one smiles, and then declines to accept a man; one is sneered at if one smiles, and the man fails to come to one's feet. I am tired of the whole theory."

"There has not been much 'due deliberation' on the part of Greville."

"How can you tell that?"

She glances at him keenly for a moment from under her long lashes.

"I have already told you that I think him the most ingenuous youth I know. He wears his heart upon his sleeve."

"For me to peck at?"—with a low, unmirthful laugh. "Am I then a bird of prey? It is well to know how I stand with you. And so I owe this Captain Greville some return, you think?"

"I am sure he counts upon your acceptance."

"That may be so, indeed. It would be too much to expect of any man that he should believe a woman could reject him!"

She leans back in her seat, and lets her lids droop until her eyes are altogether hidden; a little carelessly-suppressed smile, full of pretty malice, curves her faultless lips.

"You are bitter," says Vyner, slowly.

He has not once removed his gaze from her mocking, downcast face, so fair, so cold, so full of clashing possibilities.

"I am as Nature made me," returns she.

"Nature should be congratulated; you are indeed a masterpiece."

"There is no one beside thee and no one above thee;
Thou standest alone as the nightingale sings."

Miss Ponsonby, lifting her white lids with slow grace, gazes at him in an astonishment half feigned, wholly scornful.

"You *do* know how to utilize your time," she says. "But to rehearse to *me*! I think it only fair you should reveal the name of the happy being for whom all this rhapsody is really meant."

"Some other time, some other day," quotes Vyner, carelessly. "My *affaires* are too intricate to be discussed all in one moment. Let us return to Greville. A marriage with him would please your aunt. You complain of her coldness: this might propitiate her."

"Pah!" she says. "What a stranger I am to you in reality, in spite of the years that bind us. Of all in this world, I am the very last who would seek to propitiate Lady Bouverie. Be assured I shall not marry to please *her*."

"Whom then?"—bending rather eagerly towards her, "'Dad'?"

"No"—coldly—"myself! In doing that I shall please Dad too. You at least understand him sufficiently to know I speak the truth when I say that. But, as to pleasing Lady Bouverie, I owe her too many little elegant insults to be on her side."

"Does she owe you nothing?"

"Really I don't care whether she does or not," says Audrey, with rather undue warmth. "Take her part as much as ever you like; I expect nothing better of you. I dare say she is the most estimable of her sex, and that it is my lamentable want of taste that makes me think otherwise."

"I don't take her part," returns Vyner, losing his self-control so far as to let an angry gleam come into his eyes. "I take no one's part, for that matter."

"You are right. There is nothing so safe as neutrality. True wisdom consists in looking care-

fully after the interests of number one. I am truly wise."

"I hope so; but you must pardon me"—curtly—"if I confess I don't think so. If you considered Lady Bouverie's relationship to you a little more than you do, it might, I think, be of some use to you." There is silence for a very short minute; and then—

"It is such a pity," says Miss Ponsonby, slowly, "that you cannot cure yourself of that shocking habit you have of lecturing me. If, in all the years we have known each other, you could even *once* congratulate yourself on the certainty that you had done me any good by your preaching, I would say by all means continue it, objectionable though it be; but—can you?"

"No; therefore I must beg your pardon," says Vyner, with ill-suppressed mortification, "whilst feeling that my presumption precludes the possibility of your granting it." Then, in a moment, he recovers himself, and, throwing himself back against the cushions, laughs a little. "I deserved it, didn't I," he exclaims, lightly, "to rush upon my fate like that? But how little mercy there is in you! Do you know, I dread a woman without a heart?"

"So do I"—with a little shrug; "that is why I take such care of mine; I can tell you I wouldn't be without it for the world, though you are always advising me to dispose of it to Sir Chicksy or Captain Greville—or—indeed, it doesn't seem to matter to you whom."

"You mistake," says Vyner, coolly; when I did so far presume as to offer you advice, I alluded to your hand, not your heart. For my own part, in spite of

your words just now, I do not believe you have a heart at all."

"Have *you?*" asks she quickly, turning to him. There is an angry defiance in her eyes.

"No"—with an indifferent smile—"it is gone from me—lost—never to be regained!"

Silence follows upon his words. They seem to have established even a greater coldness, a deeper chill in the conversation, than existed before. A certain sternness has come into Vyner's face that, as a rule, is foreign to it. When the stillness has become insupportable, Audrey by an effort breaks it.

"Your advocacy of my aunt was unfortunate," she says, quietly. "Let us never discuss her again. She jars upon me. Her conduct towards me is that of an enemy. She keeps her eye upon my lightest action."

"Why should your actions be light?" asks he, slowly.

When his words are beyond recall, he would gladly have had them back again; but it is then too late. Her very lips grow white as she turns her face with a startled passion to his. For one second she looks as if she could *kill* him as he sits there apparently so calm, so indifferent; then an anguished sound breaks from her, a sigh that grows into a hushed sob of concentrated anger.

"*You mean?*" she asks, in a choked voice, her slender fingers tightening convulsively upon a fold of her white gown.

It is too late for retreat or apology.

"I mean that I saw you in the conservatory half an hour ago," says Vyner, his face now nearly as white as hers.

"You are a spy!" returns she, in a low strange voice.

"I am not!" returns he, with a quick flush and a touch of dignity. "It was the merest chance—the greatest misfortune—and I was there for a moment only! But—he was kissing your hands—he was on his knees—I shall *never* forget his face! And yet now you tell me—you give me to understand at least—that you mean nothing! What am I to think? But perhaps you only lied to me as women will, and you *do* care for him?"

He lays his hand roughly upon hers. Every vestige of colour is now gone from his face. He has evidently felt that *bêtise* of his more than he knows.

"I did not lie!" returns she, in a low tone. She draws her hand from his, and turns her face away.

"I am sorry I said—*that*," says Vyner, presently. He is looking moodily upon the ground.

"About my actions? It is nothing." A rather wan little smile curves her lips. "I am accustomed to hard speeches; and, after all, 'sound is only broken air'—so think no more of it."

"I shall never cease to think of it until I am sure I have obtained your forgiveness."

"*Be* sure of it, then. Let us say you but jested. 'Life is a jest, and all things show it.' " She laughs in a tuneless way that is very mournful, and moves her head from side to side with a fretful, weary gesture. "Shall we return to the ball-room?"

She half rises as she speaks; but he detains her.

"I wonder how you regard me?" he says, earnestly, his hand upon her arm—"as a friend—an enemy?"

"An enemy? *No*. That would be too great an

exertion. And, besides"—quickly—"I do you the justice to know that you are one who would not wilfully or of a set purpose injure any one."

"As a friend, then?"

"Oh, no!"—with a little bitter smile—"not *that!* You do not love me—you *could* not hate me—sometimes I am an amusement to you; but always you are as indifferent to me as—I am to you."

"In one particular you wrong me," says Vyner, dropping her arm. "I could find it the easiest thing in the world to hate you—at times."

She laughs, and turns towards the door that leads into the room beyond. The sweet subtle sound of the distant music comes to them through the scented air, soaring, dying, thrilling as it passes them, to fade away among the leaves beyond. No human voice is near to mar its harmony or kill the sad charm of it. The melancholy drip, drip of a small fountain blends with it, rising and falling with it in gentlest sympathy, with a little plaintive sobbing, sad, but pleasant to the ear. They two are as much alone as though leagues, not paces, separate them from a laughing, glittering crowd—and even more apart in soul than in body are they from one another, so strangely do their spirits jar, so wide is the gulf that yawns between her heart and his.

"You are rested?" he says, following her.

"And refreshed. You cannot think what good you have done me," returns she, glancing at him with a mocking light in her beautiful eyes. "To sit awhile and listen in tranquil silence to the voice of friendship is——"

"A truce to all that!" interrupts Vyner, with an

impatient wave of his hand. Then he comes closer to her. "And so you really don't mean to marry Greville?" he asks, calmly.

"No"—carelessly. "That affecting scene you witnessed in the conservatory a while ago meant my refusal."

She stoops to give her train a little careful set, and then moves forward into the more brilliant ante-chamber outside. Having gained the ball-room and an anxiously expectant partner, she turns and dismisses Vyner with a little polished inclination of her haughty head.

END OF VOL. I.

Hungerford, Margaret Wolfe

Green pleasure and grey grief

Bd.: 1

1886

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